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CHRISTOLOGIES FROM THE INDIAN SOURCES

**Edited by
Sebastian Painadath**

ISSN 0970 - 1125

Vol. XXXIII No. 195

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

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A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Christologies from the Indian Sources

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Editorial

Pluralism in theology is an accepted reality today in the Church. Pluralism is based on three facts: (a) the Divine is an unfathomable mystery and hence there is scope for a variety of theological approaches to this mystery; (b) every human perception is limited and hence there is no one absolute theology; (c) theology evolves in response to the life-context, which is characterized by an immense diversity of cultures and religions.

The living context of India offers a rich material for diverse ways of theological reflection. The Indian way of thinking is very sensitive to the incomprehensibility of the Divine mystery and well attuned to pluralistic ways of theological perceptions. The living reality of the diversity of religions and cultures as well as the struggles of the poor and the oppressed offer a multifaceted *locus theologicus* for Christians in India. Pluralistic patterns of thinking is a grace of this country and hence theological pluralism is a responsibility for the Church.

In this issue of *Jeevadhara* certain sources of religions and cultures are examined and a Christological exploration is attempted. The sources are some classical scriptures, spiritual traditions and the contemporary socio-economic scenario. Within the space limitation of an article no author may claim that he has done full justice to the study of the source; however the authors being experts of the sources concerned have focused on the central insights and questions. They analyse the text and the context, and show how the mystery of God hidden in them could find christological articulation. No attempt is made to read Christian faith into these sources; rather the authors try to articulate the divine mystery revealed in Jesus Christ pulsating in these scriptures, traditions and struggles. Thus they find the vibrations of the *divine Logos* in the sacred scriptures, the *groaning of the Spirit* in the agonies of the dalits.

Augustine Thottakara offers a detailed study of the Guru-tradition of India and examines how Jesus could be called the Sad-Guru, Saviour-Guru. St. Augustine had described Christ as the *interior master*

enlightening the paths of all human persons. A rediscovery of this christological title can be very appealing to the Indian mind. Gispert Sauch analyses the beautiful spiritual classic *Naradabhaktisutra* and describes how the bhakti described in this little book could help Christians deepen their devotion to Christ the divine master. Subhash Anand presents the reality of Krishna in the light of *Bhagavata Puranah* and shows how Christ meets this Saviour-symbol and transcends it. V. Francis Vineeth examines the Upanishads in exploration of their *advaitic* experience; he also studies the writings of the Oriental Fathers on *theosis*, the divinisation of the human through the grace of the Spirit of Christ. Are there not convergent lines between the Indian perception of *advaita* and the Christian insight into *theosis*? His article pursues this question. A. Alangaram looks at the tragic situation of the dalits in India. He finds in their sufferings and struggles the continuation of the salvific event of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

The reflections offered here point to some of the directions Indian theologies are taking today. Certain valid methodologies of contextualised theological reflections are to be seen in them. The image of Christ that emerges from these reflections resonates with the religious psyche of the Indians. This is not a Christology of royal images or abstract categories; this is not the Christ captured in dogmas or enshrined in rituals. This is the Christ that washes the feet of humans and walks with them on the path of their sufferings. This Christ meets us in the *cave of the heart* of the seekers and in the huts of the poor. He is of our flesh and blood, and hence the Saviour who takes the humans to the other shore.

It is hoped that this issue of *Jeevadhara* would be taken as a response to the call of the Asian Synod:

"The Synod Fathers stressed many times the need to evangelize in a way that appeals to the sensibilities of the Asian peoples, and they suggested images of Jesus which would be intelligible to Asian minds and cultures and, at the same time, faithful to the Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Among them were Jesus Christ as the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the Compassionate Friend of the Poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One. " (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 20)

The Guru Ideal of Hinduism and the Guruship of Christ

Augustine Thottakara

One of the sublime elements of India's spiritual heritage is the tradition of spiritual masters (gurus). Augustine Thottakara describes the characteristic features of a guru in the light of the Upanishads and other classical texts. Out of personal self-realisation the guru accompanies the disciple on his/her inner journey to the experience of the Atman. In this sense the guru embodies divine presence to the seekers and hence even esteemed somewhat similar to God in human form. Hence the great scope of exploring the mystery of Christ, the Saviour-Guru, the Sadguru. The author however upholds the divine origin of Jesus' person in contrast to all other gurus. Augustine Thottakara CMI is Dean of Philosophy at the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore - 560029.

1. Introduction

The concept of Guru, the ideology behind it and the cult connected with it were for the first time powerfully proposed, and then reverently enshrined in written texts and firmly imprinted in the Indian psyche by the older or principal Upanishads. The very word 'Upanishad' implies the vital role a Guru had to play in the communication of the saving knowledge to the disciple and thus to take him/her across the other shore of the ocean of existence. 'Upanishad' means to sit near (the Guru); to sit near the teacher and imbibe the sacred and secret wisdom about Brahman-Atman from him. In fact, the entire Upanisadic texts contain the words of Gurus either by way of answering the queries of disciples on metaphysical, spiritual and ethical questions, or by way of spontaneous instructions of the teachers according to the needs of the disciples. Vedantic wisdom was considered, as mentioned earlier, secret

and sacred, and therefore, only the initiated were worthy to receive it. Initiation of the student, communication of the inner wisdom, thus enlightening the disciple to discover his own divine nature, guiding him safely through the tumultuous sea of existence to the eternal bliss - these are things which the Upanisadic preceptors did, or wanted to do, to their disciples.

Indian spiritual tradition, especially as it is demonstrated in the Upanisadic body of literature, is very emphatic and clear on the need of a Guru in the pilgrimage of the spiritual seeker to perfection and liberation. "This Atman can never be comprehended if taught by an inferior person. Unless it is taught by a competent person, there is no way to it" (*Kaṭha Up.* II.8). "The knowledge directly learnt from one's own teacher becomes most beneficial" (*Chāndogya Up.* IV.9.3). Guru Nanak says: "If a hundred moons went up, and a thousand suns arose, even in such enormous light, intense darkness will prevail without a Guru".¹ Listen to what Vivekananda has to say in this regard:

You cannot conquer the world by your own efforts. The ego is a very powerful elephant, which cannot be brought under control by any other creatures less powerful than a Guru, whose very looks make the elephant-like-ego tremble and die. You will know in due course that your glory lies where you cease to exist. In order to gain that state you should surrender yourself. Then the master sees that you are in a fit state to receive guidance and he guides you.²

The following Upanisadic sentences depict succinctly but clearly the nature and role of a Guru, and the character and duty of a disciple.

After having carefully examined the worlds gained by deeds, an intelligent seeker should become indifferent to them, because deeds, which are transient, cannot win the supreme Being, who is unoriginated. Therefore, to know that Being, let him, with sacrificial fuel in hand, approach a Guru, who is well-versed in the scriptures and already established in Brahman. To such a disciple, whose mind

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1. Guru Nanak quoted in S.S. Uban, *The Gurus of India*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970, p.130.
 2. Vivekananda quoted in T.N. Venkataraman, *Maharshi's Gospel*, Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1969, p.37.

is tranquil and senses are controlled, and who approaches the Guru in the proper manner, let the wise teacher impart the science of Brahman in its very essence - the science by which one knows the true, imperishable Being (*Muṇḍaka Up.* I.2.12-13).

This text in a way eminently enunciates the Upanisadic vision of a real Guru and a genuine disciple. A Guru should be a wise man with great power of discernment (*vidvān*); he should be a knower of the sacred texts (*śrotrīya*), which embody the eternal truths about God, soul and matter; and he should live in constant union with God, that is, should be already established in Brahman (*brahmaniṣṭa*). The text also indirectly declares that a Guru should be accessible and approachable to a genuine seeker. Based on this text, Sankaracarya in his famous work *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* ("The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination") elaborates the specific characteristics of a real Guru: "He is a man well-versed in the sacred scriptures and is straightforward, who is not tormented by desires, who is the best among the knowers of Brahman, who has taken refuge in Brahman only, who is calm, and is like the fire which has consumed all its fuel, who is an ocean of unconditional mercy, and who is like a close relative to those who take refuge in him" (verse 33).

In the same text Sankara declares that there are three noble and rare things that can happen to a migrating self, namely, 'birth as a human being, the genuine desire for liberation in that birth, and the possibility of taking refuge in the care of a perfected person (Guru) (*mahāpuruṣa-samśrayah*)' (v.3).

Kulārṇava Tantra, a Saiva Agama text, enumerates some auspicious and common sense qualities of a Guru: 'He is clean and modest in dress, charming, endowed with auspicious signs, knower of the truths of Agama literature, pleasing in appearance, happy-faced, easily accessible to students, clean in body, destroyer of illusion and doubt, seer of external things with an inner eye, all-knowing, compassionate to all creatures, who has controlled the cravings of the senses, and who is dear to devotees.'³

3. Cf. *Kulārṇava Tantra* XIII.38-50; XIII.69-81: *śuddha-veśa, manohara, sarvalakṣana-smpanna, priyadarśana, sumukha, sulabha, śauca, bhrama-samśaya-nāśaka, antarlakṣya-bahirdṛṣṭi, sarvajña, sarvajiva-dayāpara, svādhinendriya-samcāra, bhaktapriya* /

The above-cited Upanisadic text also delineates the picture of a good disciple. He should examine and evaluate the world objectively and diligently. This would lead him to the knowledge of the ephemerality and transitoriness of the elemental world and everything that pertains to it. Consequently he would become indifferent and disinterested in this world and would not put his trust in it. He has to, through spiritual practices, make his mind tranquil, control his senses and body. Then he should, for further advancement in the spiritual journey, approach a competent Guru in the proper manner. He should be able to put his trust and faith in him unconditionally and surrender and submit to him totally.

2. Clad in the Word of God

The *Muṇḍaka Up.* begins with a short story. Sage Aṅgiras was an eminent knower of Brahman. He received this sacred wisdom from his saintly ancestors. There lived at that time in his place a famous householder named Saunaka, who was a true seeker of the knowledge of Brahman (*brahma-jijñāsu*). Once he approached Aṅgiras in the proper manner prescribed in the scriptures, namely, with sacrificial fuel as a gift to the revered teacher, and asked him: "Revered Sir, what is that, knowing which everything else in the world becomes known to us?" (I.1.3).

To him Aṅgiras replied: There are two kinds of knowledge to be acquired, as indeed the knowers of Brahman of old have said, namely, the lower knowledge and the higher knowledge.

Of these the lower knowledge consists of the wisdom of *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Atharvaveda*, science of phonetics, laws of rituals, grammar, etymology, poetical metrics and astronomy. And the higher knowledge is that by which the Imperishable is realized.

What is invisible, ungraspable, unoriginated and attributeless; what has neither eyes, nor ears, nor hands, nor feet; what is eternal, all-pervading, immeasurable, subtle and limitless in manifestation, - that imperishable Reality is what the wise men perceive as the source of all these created things (I.1.4-6).

The discussion here is evidently on the two types of knowledge. According to the philosophical tradition of India, the basic means for right knowledge are three, namely, perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*) and verbal testimony (*śabda*). The Upanisad here very

emphatically declares that all the knowledge and information we acquire through all these right means for right knowledge actually belongs to the lower form of knowledge (*aparā vidyā*). Even the divine and sacred knowledge enshrined in the revealed holy texts about supra-mundane and supernatural realities, even the wisdom we gather from the mouth of the revered teacher - all these knowledge data belong to the lower level of knowledge. The Upanisad specifically mentions the four Vedas, the most sacred, the most authoritative and normative and most important body of the sacred scriptures of Hinduism, and boldly states that these hallowed texts too impart only lower knowledge. The orthodox Hindus believe that the Vedic (*Śruti*) texts are eternal, authorless, uncreated, self-evident and infallible. The Upanisad categorizes this sacred body of scriptures as containing only lower type of knowledge.

What is then the higher knowledge or the supreme wisdom (*parā vidyā*)? The Upanisad defines it as 'the knowledge by which the Imperishable is realized'. The immediate and sure means for God-realization is this supreme knowledge. This is an inner experience and is in the form of intuitive, immediate, direct mystical knowledge of the Divine. The spiritual seeker reaches this state of inner experience at the end of his spiritual pilgrimage, and there is no return from this ultimate point of his material existence. This is the goal of all his spiritual endeavours (*sādhana*s). His/her body will break down and he/she will merge into the Divine, or be united to God, the object of his love and devotion.

A Guru has to be a *śrotrīya*, that is, well-versed in the sacred scriptures and other allied subjects. This holy erudition may belong to the lower level of knowledge as the Upanisad sees it. But this knowledge and enlightenment are the immediate means for the supreme knowledge (*parā vidyā*), which in turn is the immediate and definite means to reach the goal. Through the lower types of knowledge we gain correct spiritual perspective and select right options for life, which would in turn purify our mind and make us receptive of the higher form of experiential mystical knowledge. Needless to say that the Guru is steeped in the spirit of the sacred scriptures.

The peace chant of *Rgveda* says: "The Word is established in my mind; the mind is established in my word". The divine Word is synchronized with the human word, and both merge into the mind. The

mind is pervaded by the Word, and the word is pervaded by this Word-energized mind. "The wise should merge the speech in mind and mind in intellect, and intellect in the self and the self in the cosmic Self of peace" (*Kaṭha Up.* III.13). An old Sanskrit verse says: "As the mind so is the word, and as the word so is the deed. In the holy people there exists perfect harmony between mind, word and deed."⁴ Guru's mind, word and deed are penetrated and invigorated by the Word of God, and there is absolute congruence and conformity between his mind, word and deed.

Chāndogya Up. I.4.2 says that gods in order to protect themselves from the attacks of demons and evil-doers took refuge in the sacred book and they covered themselves with the Word of God. A Guru is like that. He is permeated and pervaded by the creative and sanctifying wisdom and Word of God and he dresses himself with the protective and ameliorating power of the sacred Word.

3. The *Tryambaka*: The Knower of God (*Brahmavid*) and Established in God (*Brahmaniṣṭa*)

The word 'tryambaka', three-eyed, is used as an epithet to Lord Siva. He is supposed to have three eyes. The third eye sees everything, nothing escapes from the all-knowing power of this divine eye. It is opened to destroy the evil. But above all this eye signifies the inner knowledge and divine enlightenment he possesses. The effulgent light of the third eye of wisdom kills ignorance and allows him to see and judge things, events and persons in the correct perspective. A Guru is a *tryambaka*. His inner third eye has destroyed all the traces of ignorance within him, enlightened him to the awareness that he is firmly established in the Absolute, and enables him to say 'I am Brahman' (*aham brahmāsmi*). The third eye of knowledge and the enlightenment it awakens empower and qualify him to annihilate the ignorance of those who take refuge in him, enlighten them and finally tell them 'Thou art That' (*tat tvam asi*).

In *Chāndogya Up.* VII.1 the great sage Narada approaches the Guru Sanatkumara, who is one of the four sons of Brahma himself, and begs him for the knowledge of Brahman. Sanatkumara demands Narada to explain what he already knew. Narada replies

4. *yathā citte tathā vāco yathā vāci tathā kriyāyām /*
citte vāci kriyāyām sādḥūnām ekarūpatā //

Revered Sir, I have learnt *R̥gveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda* as the fourth; all the Epics and Puranas as the fifth; then grammar, rules of ancestor worship, mathematics, science of portents, knowledge of treasures, logic, ethics, knowledge of divinities, knowledge of Vedic mantras, knowledge of elements, science of war, science of stars, knowledge of serpents and knowledge of celestial beings - all this I know revered Sir.

Then he adds: "Such am I revered Sir, but I am only a knower of words; and am not a knower of Atman.⁵ Indeed I have heard from great persons like you that a knower of Atman goes beyond grief. I am in such a state of grief. Revered Sir, make me cross over this (ocean) of grief". Then Sanatkumara gradually instructs him about Brahman.

Evidently the Guru Sanatkumara is an *ātmavid*, the knower of Brahman/Atman. For the older Upanisads knowing is becoming. Knowing Brahman means you become Brahman. *Brahmavid āpnoti param*, "one who knows Brahman attains Brahman" (*Taittirīya* Up. II.1.1). But this knowing happens on a higher plane, in the realm of spirit, and not in the ambit of senses, mind and intellect. As has already been mentioned earlier this is the stage of the supreme wisdom (*parā vidyā*).

Therefore, a Guru is *Brahmavid* or *Ātmavid*, and such a person is also *Brahmaniṣṭa*, established in Brahman. They are *Jīvanmuktas* (Advaita Vedanta) and *Bodhisattvas* (Mahayana Buddhism). In fact, by bringing together two very eminent personalities of the mythological age as Guru and disciple the Upanisad was stressing the need of a spiritual preceptor for all those who wish to attain the supreme wisdom. Only a worthy teacher can give a deserving disciple the third eye of wisdom.

The Yoga of Patañjali declares that the highest goal of the spiritual journey of a yogin through the eight-membered yogic psycho-somatic discipline is *samādhī*, and that too the supra-conscious *samādhī* (*asamprajñāta-samādhī*). It is a kind of blissful trance and total absorption into the object of meditation where the spiritual aspirant is not even conscious of himself/herself. Likewise, the fourth noble truth advocated by the Buddha consists of the eight-fold path. The ultimate stage of the journey through this path is the right concentration (*samyag*

5. Ch Up. VII.1.3. *so'ham bhagavo mantravid evāsmi nātmavid /*

samādhi). In the same way Advaita philosophy speaks about the final and decisive advaitic experience. It is the blissful enlightenment and awakening that descends on the seeker about his/her total identity with Brahman, the realization of *aham brahmāsmi*-consciousness. All these supra-normal states of human existence, namely, the supra-conscious *samādhi* of Yoga, the *samyag samādhi* of Buddhism and the advaitic *anubhava* of Vedānta, are in fact, other expressions of the *parā vidyā*, which helps the seeker to get the third eye of wisdom. A common saying states, "Salutations to the revered Guru, who has opened the inner eye of the disciple, who was blind with the cataract of ignorance, with the collirium stick of knowledge".⁶

The derivation of the word 'guru' is often made in this sense, that is, as a dispeller of ignorance. Undoubtedly the primary use of the word is as an adjective, and connotes weighty, heavy or significant. As a noun then this word would mean a honourable and important person; a Guru definitely is such a revered person. A plausible meaning as the destroyer of ignorance is derived in a somewhat roundabout way. The letter 'gu' stands for guha, meaning a cave or hole, which is symbolic of darkness and ignorance; and the verbal root 'ru' (*rauti*) means to kill, to hurt (or, the verbal root 'rudh' [*ruṇaddhi*] means to obstruct or destroy), and therefore, 'guru' is a person who kills and destroys ignorance. Another verbal root 'gr' (*grṇāti*) means to proclaim, announce or utter; and with the masculine ending 'ru', the word 'Guru' would mean the announcer or teacher of the saving wisdom to his disciples. In either case, Guru is one who expels and eliminates ignorance, the cause of all evil, and enlightens the worthy students with knowledge.

4. Embodiment of Compassion and Repository of Discerning Power

Chāndogya Up. IV.4 narrates the story of a boy called Satyakama. His mother was Jabala, who bore him out of wedlock. It seems that she had, in her youth, relationship with many men, and she did not know who the boy's father was. Satyakama, a boy of spiritual inclination, though he was not initiated and therefore was not a *dvija* (twice-born), wanted to become a *brahmacārin*, Vedic student, and learn the Vedas

6. *ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-salākṣā /
cakṣur unmilitam yena tasmai srigurave namah //*

and the Vedanta. At the instruction of his mother he approached the great Guru Haridrumata Gautama.

Gautama asked him, 'Dear boy, of what lineage are you?' He replied, 'Sir, I do not know of what lineage I am. I asked my mother, and she replied, 'I was engaged in many works and had relations with many. I gave birth to you in my youth. Having been such, I could not know of what lineage you are. However, I am Jabala by name, and you are named Satyakama'. So Sir, I am Satyakama Jabala.

The teacher said to him, 'No one who is not a Brahmin can speak thus. Dear boy, bring the sacrificial fuel, I shall initiate you as a *brahmacārin*, you have not deviated from truth' (*Ch Up.*IV.4.4-5).

We could discern two important characteristics in the behaviour of the Guru Gautama.

(i) His compassion outweighed the dictates of tradition and scriptural injunctions. The eligibility for the learning of a particular branch (*adhikāritva*) entails two things: Firstly, the genuine desire to learn this science (*arthitva*). In the case of Satyakama it was there. Secondly, freedom from impediments and worthiness to enter into this sacred realm (*sāmarthyā*). To learn Vedanta, one should be a male member of one of the three upper castes. Only these are eligible for initiation, and only the initiated can take up the sacred Vedic and Vedantic studies. Though the parentage and lineage of Satyakama was unknown, and though it was known that the boy was the son of a woman of bad reputation, the Guru was courageous and generous enough to initiate him for the sacred studies. He might have said to himself 'one becomes a Brahmin not by birth but by deeds'. More than erudition and eloquence what a Guru really should possess is compassion. The all-pervasive compassion and benevolence have precedence over the merits and demerits, talents and stupidities, eagerness and mediocrity of the student. Guru is like the sun. The sun shines on the virtuous and wicked, on the intelligent and idiot alike; its shining rays make no distinction between the palace of the king and the hut of the beggar. Like that 'good preceptor show mercy to even useless beings'.⁷ Sankaracarya in his

Vivekacūdāmani makes the Guru utter the following words of consolation:

Fear not, O learned one, there is no danger for you. There is a means to cross over this sea of existence (*samsāra*). I shall show you the very way by which the sages have traveled to the other shore. There is a way to put an end to your fear of *samsāra*. Through that way you will be able to cross the ocean of existence to the supreme bliss (vv.43-44).

In the same text Sankara qualifies a Guru as the 'best of the knowers of Brahman and an ocean of mercy' (v.15).

(ii) The discerning power of the preceptor stands out. He intuited that the boy is stainless and earnest and his desire is genuine and intense. He saw in this aspirant for spiritual perfection a genuine seeker of the knowledge of Brahman, and a future Guru. In fact, *Chāndogya Up.* IV.10 ff. depict Satyakama as an eminent Upanisadic teacher. It should also be noted that Gautama did not instruct Satyakama immediately. He tested the candidate's willingness and bodily and mental preparedness by giving him some arduous household duties (tending the cows of the teacher in the forest). Then only he imparted the sacred knowledge.

Power of discernment - *viveka* - is perhaps the most essential element of competency needed for spiritual preceptor and primary virtue demanded from a disciple. *Viveka* is the innate and sagacious power of discrimination and discernment. It is prudence in judgements, words and deeds. The great non-dualist Sankara says that the first of the four means (*sādhana-catustaya*) to engender the desire to know Brahman is this discrimination. A preceptor should be able to discern between eternal and non-eternal things, essential and non-essential things and important and unimportant things. Then only he can demand it from his ward. Ramanuja, another great Vedantin, mentions seven accessories or aids to *bhakti*, which for him is the direct means for liberation, in his *Srībhāṣya* (I.1.1). And the first aid is *viveka*, discernment of what is useful and what is harmful on the way of *bhakti*, especially in the matter food.

Great *sannyāsins* and Gurus are sometimes designated as *Hamsa* or *Paramahamsa* (remember Ramakrishna Paramahamsa). *Hamsa* is a legendary divine bird. Two important characteristics are attributed to it, which the other ordinary birds do not possess. Firstly, it flies very high,

above and over all mundane things. A *sannyāsin*/Guru should be like that. He lives and moves in the world, but should be able to stand above the world, should be able to transcend body, matter and world. The second characteristic of *Hamsa* is its power of discernment (*viveka*). Pure milk is supposed to be its only food. If we offer milk diluted with water or any other liquid, it has the ability to draw and consume only the milk from the mixed liquid. The adulterating liquid will remain in the bowl. A Guru should be like that. He lives and moves in the world; but should be able to discern things and accept only the things that are meaningful, useful and beneficial to his spiritual growth.

5. A Sagacious Helmsman in the Ocean of Existence

Taittirīya Up. Section three narrates the story of a young spiritual aspirant named Bhṛgu. His teacher (Guru) was his own father Varuna. One day this boy filled with the spirit of God and possessed by the intense desire to know Brahman, approached his father and said: "Teach me about Brahman". His father thought: How can I show him Brahman? To know Brahman one should become psychosomatically disciplined, mentally pure and spiritually mature. He said to his son; 'I give you a description of the ultimate Being, Brahman. You yourself, by prayer, meditation, concentration and ascetical practices, should realize this Brahman in your life'. "That Being from which all these beings are born; that Being by which all these created beings are sustained; and that Being into which all these beings, when they die, enter into - know That. That is Brahman" (*TaitUp.* III.1). Having been instructed thus, the boy retreated and started to practice meditation and asceticism (*sa tapo'tapyata*). After a long time he came to his teacher - father - and declared: "*Annam* (food/matter) is Brahman". He stands on the physical level. The physical body emerges from matter; it is sustained by matter/food; and when it dies it dissolves into matter. This enlightenment is important. Matter/food is important for life. A seeker has to meditate on *anna* as a manifestation of Brahman. But he/she has to rise above it. His father said to him, 'you need to transcend the material/physical level and go higher'. The first verse of *Īśa Up.* expresses precisely this: "This whole universe which is mutable is pervaded by the Lord. By renouncing it, enjoy it..." Sankara thinks that this is an advise to the *sannyāsin*s. Use the world for your sustenance and nourishment; but you should have a detached, uninvolved and apathetic attitude to it. Bhṛgu again

started to meditate and practice austerity. He discovered that the vital breath (*prāṇa*) is Brahman. Life begins with life-breath, it is sustained by breath and when the breathing stops, one dies. His father/Guru said that *prāṇa* means life, and it is important that a spiritual aspirant meditates on *prāṇa* (the vital breath and force of life). But this is not the real Reality, Brahman; you have to go higher. Bhrgu, the disciple, at the advice and support of his preceptor, travelled higher and higher in an ascending scale. In successive stages he realized that mind (*manas*) and consciousness (*viñāna*) are Brahman. But his guru advised him not to stop short on these lower levels. Finally, as he attained purity of heart, concentration and serenity of mind and maturity in the spirit, his vision became clearer, he could see things in the correct perspective, he had the vision of the real Reality, and thus he was enlightened. He realized that bliss (*ānanda*) is Brahman and became a knower of Brahman (*brahmavid*). His father and teacher Varuna said: now you know Brahman. "He understood that bliss is Brahman, for certainly all beings here are indeed born from Bliss, having born, they are sustained by Bliss, and when these beings die they enter into Bliss" (*Tait Up.* III.6).

The life of the spirit is a pilgrimage from materiality and phenomenality to the Divine and to the Absolute, identified here as the supreme, unalloyed Bliss. Guru accompanies the candidate in this spiritual pilgrimage with his wise guidance. He shows his ward the right path that would lead to the ultimate goal. *Chāndogya Up.* VI.14.1-2 narrates a story to show how a teacher removes the darkness of ignorance of his disciple and shows him the right path to liberation. A man from Gandhara country was led astray blindfolded by wicked men. He was then left in an isolated place. He said to the people there: 'I am blindfolded and am far away from my home. I do not know the way to go home'. Hearing his pleas a man comes forward, removes his bandage from the eyes, takes him by hand and tells him, 'the Gandhara country is in this direction; proceed in this way and you will reach your real home'. The Upanisad then says: "Even so, in this world a person who has a preceptor knows (the way to liberation) (*evam eveha ācāryavān puruṣo veda*)". This is the business of a Guru: to remove the darkness of ignorance of his disciple and take him by hand and show him the right path that would eventually lead him to his real home.

6. Soul-mate on the Pilgrim-path

The greatest philosopher and teacher of the Upanisadic times was undoubtedly Yajnavalkya. This philosopher-saint was a friend of King

Janaka, who himself was one of the most eminent philosophers of the time. Yajnavalkya, a rich and affluent householder, had two wives: Maitreyi and Katyayani (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.* II.4.1 ff. & IV.5.1 ff.). About Maitreyi the Upanisad says that she had the habit of discussing issues related to the supreme Brahman (*brahma-vādinī*). She too was a real and earnest philosopher. About Katyayani it is said that she was an ordinary woman with ordinary feminine views (*strī-prajñā*). The time has come for Yajnavalkya to enter into the next stage of life, namely, the life of forest-hermit (*vānaprastha*). Therefore, he called his two wives and told them that he would like to divide his immense wealth between them two. It was alright for Katyayani. But Maitreyi asked him: "Revered Sir, even if this whole earth filled with all the wealth of the world be mine, shall I become immortal by that?" Yajnavalkya replied that there was absolutely no hope for immortality through wealth (*amṛtatvasya tu na-āśāsti vittena*). 'If that were the case', Maitreyi replied, 'I do not want your wealth. Teach me the means to attain immortality'. Yajnavalkya becomes the Guru of his learned wife and started a long discourse on the phenomenality and ephemerality of all worldly things and all worldly loves. A real seeker for the knowledge of Brahman and thereby for immortality should transcend all his/her limited loves and concerns for persons, things and events, and set his/her mind and heart steadily and constantly on the supreme goal of human life, on God. Our ordinary desires and loves, like the desire for wealth, health and progeny, should be subjected to and permeated by the passionate desire for the saving knowledge of Brahman and thereby realization of God, which alone can guarantee immortality. It is in this context that Yajnavalkya utters the famous sentence: "O Maitreyi, the supreme Self is to be realized by listening, by reflection and by contemplation" - *śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāśana* (Br Up. IV.5.6). These three noble means proposed by the Upanisad, namely, listening, reflection and contemplation are eminently suited for mastering wisdom, as well as for reaching the goal of our existence.

Maitreyi definitely was a great woman saint who was well educated, philosophically and theologically well informed, and spiritually fully-grown. Still she needed the guidance of a Guru to steer clear of the dangers in her journey to spiritual heights. Ultimate spiritual wisdom, according to the Indian spiritual tradition, should flow into the disciple, however eminent and learned he/she might be, from the heart of the

teacher. Here husband becomes the Guru of his wife. Discipleship knows no age. About Ramanuja, the founder of Visistadvaita Vedanta, it is said that his first teacher was Yadava Prakasha. But later this teacher, realizing the spiritual eminence, Vedantic wisdom and scriptural scholarship of Ramanuja, became his disciple. The same thing happened in the life of Madhva, the great founder and philosopher of Dvaita Vedanta. His teacher and the Guru who initiated him to the life of *sannyāsa* was Achyutaprekshya. But in the course of time Achyutaprekshya realized that Madhva was greater than he in spirituality and knowledge, and he readily became the disciple of his disciple. Guruship is a gift of God and special charism granted to a selected few.

7. Benefactor of all Beings (*Sarvabhūta-hite ratāh*)

The sages of old are known for their measureless compassion and immense love for all sentient beings including plants and trees. The membership to their *āśram* was not restricted to humans alone. Animals, birds, and plants enjoyed the fellowship and protection of the inmates of the *āśram*. The animals too responded to this limitless love and compassion in the same way. Even carnivorous and ferocious beasts of prey, when they enter the *āśram* domain (*āśrama-bhoga*), leave back their violent nature and instinct for killing, and learn to live with others peacefully and pleasantly. It is as if the powerful spirit of love and *ahimsā* of the Guru of the *āśram* and of its holy milieu pervaded and enveloped the sanctuary, and positively energized all the entrants. This spirit elevates the *sattvic* quality and consciousness and relegates their inferior nature to the background, making them assimilate this spirit of love and compassion. Sage Kanva and his *āśram* in the famous drama *Abhijñānaśākuntala* of the immortal poet-dramatist Kalidasa is a point of reference here. Kanva definitely was not a solitary and superhuman recluse. He was the *kulapati* of a *gurukula*. The drama gives clear evidences that there were male and female students at his *asram*. *Abhijñānaśākuntala* is often quoted to demonstrate how the great sages and Gurus of old integrated into their holy lives the entire nature, which included the elemental forces, the animal world and vegetative life. Their charity extended beyond the humans and embraced the entire cosmos. The fourth chapter of *Abhijñānaśākuntala* is a powerful display of this universal love. The sensibility and sensitivity Kanva poignantly expresses as he requests all the trees and animals to bless Sakuntala and

to bid farewell to her, the mental agony Sakuntala endures as she takes leave from her dear animal and plant friends, the stupor and anguish the entire *āśram* territory experiences at the thought of Sakuntala's departure - all these powerfully indicate how the life in *gurukula* is intimately glued together to nature, and how the *Kulapati*, the Guru, maintained and nourished this soul-relationship of the whole cosmos.

It cannot be otherwise. The human who is a knower of Brahman, who is established in Brahman, who sees and judges things and events from a supra-normal point of view has to be in essence and attributes a cosmic lover. S/he sees unity of Being and life everywhere. This is very well expressed in the famous *Gita* passage: "A wise man perceives a learned Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and even a dog-eater equally".⁸

In this context it is good to recall the strange story narrated in *Chāndogya Up.* The Vedic student Satyakama, about whom mention has already been made earlier (see no.4), is instructed in the Brahman-knowledge by a bull, by fire, by a swan and by a Madgu bird (aquatic bird) (*Ch Up.* IV.5-8). Each of these taught him one step each of Brahman (*brahmaṇaśca te padam bravīni*). Definitely these were four human teachers, but symbolically represented as animals and elements. What was the intention of the Upanisadic seer in presenting this story in this way? The foundational doctrine of the Upanisads is the unity of Being. There is only one Being; the apparent multiplicity is anchored in this one Being; and every being within this Being is capable of imparting the wisdom of this Being, Brahman. But the Brahman-knowledge is completed, concluded, and confirmed by the real Guru, in our case, by Haridrumata Gautama. Nature is a great teacher.

8. Guru and *Āśram*

(i) *Guru is like an avatara, an incarnation*

When the time is ripe he emerges; he happens. A Guru is not appointed by a higher authority. He is a spontaneous source of grace and blessing, a centre of peace and bliss and an abode of harmony and integration that happens to a given locality, society and to seeking

8. *vidyā-vinaya-sampanne brāhmane gavi hastini /
śuni caiva śvapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśināḥ* // (*Gītā* V.18).

persons. Ramana Maharshi is supposed to have said: "When you are ready the Guru comes to you".⁹ A Guru is often associated with an *āśram*. *Āśram* too is a spontaneous growth with the Guru, and often coeval with the life of a Guru. The simple abode of the Guru automatically becomes an *āśram*, which is open to all seekers of higher values. *Āśram* is a theme in itself, and a detailed study of it is beyond the scope of this essay. A description of an *āśram*:

An Ashram may be called a place of an intense and sustained spiritual quest, centred round a Guru, man or woman (usually one - sometimes more than one) recognized by others as person of deep spiritual experience. In an ashram primacy is given to this relentless quest through 'sadhanas' or specifically Indian spiritual practices. It is a place where above all, people can experience God, and live in an ever-deepening awareness of His presence. This is fostered by renunciation and detachment and an atmosphere of silence, peace and joy.¹⁰

"The real foundations of any true ashram are to be found not so much in the soil where the huts are as in the heart of the Guru who lives there, and in his personal contact in depth with the indweller".¹¹ Therefore, there cannot be a genuine asram without a Guru, and Guru's abode is always an *āśram*.

(ii) *Guru and Disciple*

The second external requisite for a Guru is disciple(s). A Guru without a disciple is a contradiction in terms. Guru means the dispeller of the ignorance of a disciple. Therefore, a Guru is born when a disciple approaches him for wisdom. Likewise a disciple emerges when he is accepted by a Guru for spiritual formation. Guru-disciple relationship is a vast theme, and a detailed treatment of this subject, as in the case of *āśram*, is beyond the scope of this essay. The ideal Guru-disciple

9. Cf. Purushottam Bilimoria, "The Spiritual Guide (Guru) and the Disciple (Sishya) in Indian Tradition", *Journal of Dharma*, V (1980), 277.

10. "What is an Indian Christian Ashram? Statement of the All India Consultation on Ashrams" (NBCLC, Bangalore, 1978). *Word and Worship*, XI (1978), 274.

11. Vandana, *Gurus, Ashrams and Christians*, London: Darton-Longman and Tod, 1978, p.16.

relationship could be appreciated in the *Gītā*, where Arjuna is an ideal disciple who needed advice and guidance, and Lord Kṛṣṇa is the ideal teacher. Another brilliant example of Guru-disciple relationship is shown in *Kaṭha Up.* where Yama is the teacher and Naciketas the student. Referring to them the Upanisad says: "Wonderful is the teacher, and smart is the disciple. Brilliant indeed is he who comprehends it when taught by an able teacher" (*Kaṭha Up.* II.7). The famous law book *Manusmṛti* gives detailed description of the duties and obligations concerning the Guru and his disciples. Listen to this: "It [divine wisdom] can be conveyed only in the living relationship of minds, one mind prepared to teach and other prepared to receive... The Guru-sishya relationship in traditional Hinduism transcends any other relationship because so much is at stake. The selection of a Guru is more significant than the selection of a spouse."¹²

Total dedication and submission to the teacher, total commitment to *vidya*, spirit of discernment, life of celibacy, radical detachment from world and life's pleasures, control of mind, senses and body, simplicity in food and life-style, compassionate love for all creatures, etc. are basic qualities of a disciple. Perhaps the attitude and demeanour of Arjuna of the *Gītā* before his teacher Kṛṣṇa depicts the correct approach of a disciple to his teacher. "I am your disciple, teach me who have taken refuge in you" (*śiṣyas te'hāṁ śādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam*) (II.7). The correct attitude of a teacher is also found in the *Gītā* where Kṛṣṇa says: "Renouncing all your duties (*karmas*), take refuge in me alone. I shall save you from all sins. Do not grieve" (XVIII.66). It also seems to me that the great Guru Sankara studied the principal Upanisads carefully, singled out all the attributes and qualifications needed for an authentic and committed disciple, epitomized them into his famous *sādhana-catustaya*, the four spiritual means, and advised that all *brahma-jijñāsus* (those who desire to know Brahman) should practise them scrupulously. They are: (i) discernment between eternal and non-eternal things, (ii) renunciation of the enjoyment of the fruits of actions, (iii) practice of the six virtues, namely, control of mind, control of senses of knowledge and organs of activity, withdrawal of self from external objects,

12. Organ, T.V., *Hinduism: Its Historical Development*, Woodbury-New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1974, p.57.

forbearance, faith and concentration of mind and intellect on Brahman, and (iv) an intense desire for final liberation from this cycle of births, deaths and rebirths.¹³ The teacher rejoices if a disciple of this calibre takes refuge in him, and he would say with teacher Yama of *Kaṭha Up.* to his disciple: "You are a disciple of true resolve indeed. May we get more seekers like you" (II.9).

It should be noted here that a Guru's relationship with the disciple consists not so much in terms of what he does, what he knows and what he teaches, it consists more in what he is. He shares primarily his being, and then what he has - his knowledge and experience.

(iii) *Guru and Mantra*

Guru advises particular *mantras* to his disciples and insists that they should recite it orally and mentally for purification of mind and eventual liberation. This is particularly true in the Tantric tradition. *Mantra* should be understood here in the technical sense: it is a short pithy sacred formula or aphorism, composed by the guru for the disciple in secret for his constant recitation. To find out such a sacred and sanctifying formula appropriate to the disciple, the teacher prepares himself. He does austerity and meditation, prayer and penance, and out of the purity of his heart the *mantra* specifically suited to the spiritual needs of the disciple emerges, like purified gold comes out of the burning furnace. He infuses into this *mantra* his spiritual powers, and impregnates it with esoteric energy. Careful contemplative recitation of this sacred formula shall be the means, the Yoga or *sādhana* for the liberation of the disciple from the embodied existence. This is *Mantra-yoga*.

Mantra-yoga is mainly practised by Tantric cults. The Guru worship in these cults is sometimes exaggerated and curious. Their public acts of Guru-worship would seem to an outsider to be ostentatious and unnatural. Practices like drinking the water with which the feet of the Guru is washed, eating the left-over food of the Guru, kissing the feet of the Guru, etc. are common among them. They believe that the Guru is custodian and bearer of the esoteric doctrines and occult powers of the cult. He communicates them only to the initiated.

13. Cf. Sankara's commentary on *Brahma-sūtra*, I.1.1, and also *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, verses 19-27.

The Guru is the only living flame of such truths and he only can charge the unlit wick of the disciple duly dipped in the oil of cult teaching with divine light. The secret of the cult is stored in the Guru, and the mere formality of teaching these truths or uttering the words of mantra will not convey enlightenment, unless done so by a Guru. Practical initiation is thus impossible without a Guru.¹⁴

9. The *Bhagavān* and the *Ṛṣi*

Praśna Up. narrates the story of six disciples, namely, Sukesha, Saibya, Sauryayani, Kausalya, Bhargava and Kabandhi. Their Guru who guides them in the spiritual pilgrimage is Pippalada, an old sage. They wanted to ask some questions to the Guru concerning the supreme Brahman. Pippalada, the wise sage, did not need much time to judge the mental preparedness and spiritual maturity of his disciples, and his answer was quick and unambiguous. "Live one year here practising austerity, celibacy and faith. Then you may ask your questions according to your desire. If I know them, assuredly I shall tell everything to you" (*Pra.Up.I.2*).

About this old venerable Guru Pippalada the Upanisad says that he was *bhagavān* and a *ṛṣi*. One who is endowed with *bhaga*, meaning, splendour, glory, knowledge, detachment, valour and enthusiasm, is *bhagavān*.¹⁵ Evidently this title is used for God, like Bhagavan Kṛṣṇa. But it is also employed to designate realized (*siddha*) Gurus. Bhagavan Buddha is an example.

Ṛṣis are seers of the Vedic *mantras* (*mantra-dṛṣṭārah*); they live and move in the word of God, observe severe austerity and are absorbed in continuous intense meditation. *Kaviḥ krāntadarsīh*, goes the saying, meaning a poet is one who sees beyond and behind the objects of experiences, which are conditioned by space, time and material dimensions. Here the poet is on par with the sages of old, the *ṛṣis*; *ṛṣis* are *krānta-darsīs*. While the sages become transcendental supra-natural seers through the sublimation of the spirit and power of Yoga, the poets

14. Walker B., "Guru", in *The Hindu World*, Vol. I, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983, p.419.

15. Cf. *Amarakośa*, III.26 and its commentary: *bhagam śrī-kāma-mahātmaya-vīrya-yatnārka-kīrtiṣu* /

become supra normal visionaries through the power of imagination and poetical intuition (*pratibhā*) and connatural talents. We, normal mortals see objects, persons and events as they are presented to us through our senses and mind in their actual materiality, measurability and dimensionality. But sages and poets transcend and enter behind the presented objects and captures extra details, intense sentiments and new meanings of these things and experiences.

Pippalada's *krānta-darśitva* (ability to see beyond) and *mantra-darśitva* (ability to realize Vedic word) enabled him to see through the inner spiritual status of his disciples, and saw with his inner eyes that these are not yet spiritually and emotionally mature to receive the knowledge of Brahman. And he, therefore, ordered them to practice austerity (*tapas*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*), and faith (*śraddhā*) for one more year.

And about the six disciples the Upanisad says that they were devoted to Brahman, steadfast in the meditation on the supreme Being and genuine seekers of the knowledge of Brahman.¹⁶ All were eminent persons respected in the society and learned in the tradition and scriptures. But they still were not worthy vessels for receiving the saving knowledge of Brahman. After one year's spiritual efforts (*sadhana*), they approached the Guru again, asked their questions, clarified their doubts and got enlightened by the grace of the teacher. The last sentence of this Upanisad is notable: "Worshipping him (the teacher), they said, 'you are our father who has taken us across the other shore beyond ignorance. Adoration to the great ṛṣis; adoration to the great ṛṣis'" (*Praśna Up.* VI.8).

10. The Progenitor par Excellence

The attribution of fatherhood to the Guru over the disciple is a strong tradition and understanding in India. One reason is that by destroying ignorance and imparting enlightenment, the teacher gives a new life to the disciple. He generates him spiritually. The law giver Manu says: "Because a teacher offers him (disciple) the Vedas he is called the father".¹⁷ Secondly, a disciple is normally a *dvija*, twice-born. This second birth happens at the initiation ceremony. Manu says that in this second birth the mother of the student is the *Gayatri-mantra* and the

16. *Prasna Up.* I.1. *brahmaparā brahmaniṣṭāh param brahmānveṣamānah /*

17. *Manusmṛti* II.171: *vedapradānād ācāryam pitaram paricakṣate /*

father is the *acarya* (Manu II.170). "The sacred thread given by the Guru to the boys of the three upper, or twice-born, *varnas*, at their initiation ceremony becomes a spiritual umbilical cord linking the student to his teacher".¹⁸ This father-son relationship between Guru and disciple is taken very seriously by the ancient teachers and spiritual masters. Therefore, marrying the daughter of the teacher by a student is very strictly forbidden by Manu and other lawgivers, because the teacher being his father, his daughter is legally the sister of the disciple. One of the five most heinous crimes that can be committed by a person, according to Manu, is having sexual relationship with the wife of one's teacher (*gurvanganagama*), because she is mother to the student, and such an act is highly incestuous (Manu XI.54).

Being the father of the student the Guru is bound to protect and nourish his student, and make the inheritor of his wealth, namely, the wealth of wisdom and sanctity. The noblest duty and highest service one can do is depositing the precious wisdom into a worthy vessel (*satpātre vidyā-dānam*), a worthy disciple.¹⁹

11. Guru and God

The term 'Guru' is applied to astounding variety of people. It is applied to the humble country teacher who just knows to impart the letters of alphabet to the kids as well as to the great sages who are storehouses of wisdom and saintliness, who live and move in an ethereal and unearthly world, who are *tapodhanas* (whose wealth is *tapas*), who are capable of blessing and cursing others effectively, - like sage Vasistha, the Guru of the kings of the solar race, or Kanva, the great ascetic, about whom mention has already been made earlier. The ordinary village temple priest, who knows to recite from memory a few Sanskrit verses, is a Guru, as also the great mystic-philosopher Sankara who has realized the Brahman-consciousness in this life and who taught the world the highest form of Vedantic wisdom. Designations with different shades

18. Miller D.M. and Wertz, D.C., *Hindu Monastic Life. The Monks and Monasteries of Bhubaneswar*, Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1976, p.92.

19. According to the sacred tradition of India, there are five fathers for a human: "The physical father, the one who initiates, the one who gives education, the one who gives food and the one who protects from fear."

of meaning are used to qualify the Guru like Satguru, Paramaguru, Jagatguru, Adiguru, Acaryaguru, Purohitaguru, etc. It is evident that all these Gurus are not of the same quality, worth and functions. But all deserve reverence and esteem.

Some identify God with Guru; Guru is God, they say. Guru deserves veneration and worship. "In the morning let him remember his Guru, utter his name and think of him as dwelling in the white lotus of his heart ... next to the great God in his three-fold aspects. There is no higher object of veneration for a man than his Gurudeva".²⁰ "These truths, when instructed, shine forth only in that great person, who has supreme devotion to God, and an equal devotion to his Guru".²¹ A common saying declares, "Guru is Brahma, Guru is Visnu, Guru is Siva. Guru indeed is the supreme Brahman. Salutations to the revered Guru".²² Here is another saying in this regard: "If God is angry with you, your Guru can save you. But if your Guru is angry with you nobody can protect you" (*deve ruṣṭe gurus trātā, gurau ruṣṭe na kaścana*). It would, however, be safer to say that in general in the spiritual tradition of India Guru is regarded as an image of God, he is God-like. Vivekananda speaking of his Guru Ramakrishna Paramahansa says: "We look upon the Master as a person who is like God. We offer him worship bordering on divine worship".²³ The famous words of Kabir (1440-1518) worth quoting: "Guru and God are both standing before me. Whose feet shall I touch first? I shall touch yours O Guru, for you revealed God to me". Guru is the divinely authorized vehicle and qualified medium for the free flow of divine grace and wisdom into the disciple. He is a skilled helmsman who judiciously steers the journey of his disciple to the divine shore. The theistic Vedanta schools and the *bhakti* movement in general consider and revere the Guru as God-like person.

20. J.D. McMichael, "Spiritual Master in the Path of Knowledge in Indian Tradition", *Journal of Dharma*, XII (1986), 18.

21. *yasya deve parā bhakti yathā deve tathā gurau / tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanah //* (*Śvetāśvatara Up.* VI.23)

22. *gurur brahmā guru viṣṇu gurur devo maheśvarah / gurur eva param brahma tasmai śrigurave namah //*

23. Vivekananda quoted in Mangalwadi W., *The World of Gurus*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1977, p.12.

It is to be noted here that modern spiritual leaders of the country, like Gandhi, Tagore, Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi, Radhakrishnan and J. Krishnamurti did not promote exaggerated forms of worship of Guru. In the wake recent Hindutva movement and efforts to recapture the traditional values and heritage, a resurgence of guruship might be in the offing.

12. Guruship of Christ

12.1. *Christ's Mission*

Jesus Christ, the second person of the holy Trinity, is God and man and is the only and unique incarnation of God. He took human flesh, lived like a human, and fulfilling the will of his eternal Father, suffered pain and death and resurrected again to life. He underwent this process of radical renunciation and total self-emptying, which eventually climaxed and culminated in his resurrection to fullness of life and divine glorification, as an act of mediation between God and humanity. By his willingly undertaken embodied existence and freely accepted life of suffering and death, he reconciled the estranged humanity with God, and opened the way for humans to the Divine.

He realized this work of salvation not only by his suffering and death but also by his preaching and teaching, by doing signs and miracles, by healing and enlivening and by doing good to people. Christ is Guru in the strictest and fullest sense of the term. We said earlier that the Upanisads contain basically and primarily the teachings and instructions of the great Gurus of that era. With equal certainty and emphasis we can state that the Gospels contain basically and primarily the teachings of Jesus, the divine Guru. He conveyed his message by direct preaching, and by signs and symbolic actions. He taught people that God is the loving Father of all and that all humans are brothers and sisters, that faith in God the Father, in Christ and in the Spirit makes us children of God, that charity with its horizontal and vertical dimensions is the golden thread that binds all humans together and humanity with God, that the reconciliation and salvation brought about by him by his incarnation, death and resurrection are to be realized by each person through his/her commitment to Christ and to the Kingdom.

12.2. *Testimonies from the Gospels*

In no uncertain terms Jesus says, "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all disciples. And call no one

your father on earth, for you have one Father - the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah" (Mt. 23:8-10). "You call me Teacher and Lord - and you are right, for that is what I am" (Jn. 13:13). "He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Mt. 7:29).

His followers, and even his detractors, spontaneously addressed him as teacher. "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one" (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 12:14; Lk. 20:21). "A man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" (Mk. 10:17). Mary Magdalene addresses the risen Lord, "in Hebrew, Rabbouni (which means Teacher)" (Jn. 20:16). Nicodemus tells Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a Teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God" (Jn. 3:2).

12.3. Christ the Ever-Enlightened One and the Enlightener

Gautama through his continued and rigorous meditation for several years became the enlightened one, the Buddha. It was an acquired buddhahood. The Gurus and sages through their constant and relentless practice of *sadhanas*, became knowers of Brahman (*brahmavid*) those established in Brahman (*brahmanista*) and those whose consciousness is established and steady (*sthitaprajna*), and also *jivanmuktas*. All these they became and acquired by bringing about a qualitative change in their inner being and innate nature. Christ in his essence, nature and attributes is ever enlightened and eternally effulgent. Being divine in nature, pure *sattvic* in character and an uncaused cause, he is never contaminated by the passions of senses and concupiscence of body, and other limiting adjuncts caused by mind, matter and body.

Needless to say that Christ enlightens others with his divine knowledge. He removes the darkness of ignorance of his disciples with his divine wisdom. He opens the third inner eye of knowledge of his dedicated followers so that they see things in the correct perspective, judge events, things and persons with discernment, accept correct options, empty the soul of ego and enslaving desires, and thus become receptive for the inflow of divine grace.

Gospels report the healings of blind persons by Christ. As in the case of all the parables of Jesus, the healings he dispensed to the sick and afflicted also are to be evaluated and commented on different levels.

There is a literal meaning to these parables and signs; then there is a symbolic meaning, and a personal and a universal meaning and application. Jesus might have literally cured blind persons who came to him for help. He touched their eyes and gave sight to them. But it has a symbolic meaning. Curing blindness means destroying the ignorance, the root cause of all evil and sin, of the persons and enlightening them to the divine realities, giving them an inner eye of wisdom that can discern, judge and accept what is conducive to the glory of God and what is good and salutary to oneself and to the society. It has a personal meaning in so far as it is addressed to me personally. I too stand in need of an inner enlightenment and spiritual awakening. And it is universally applicable to all places and to all times. The experience of the disciples on the way to Emmaus has to be explained in this sense. When Christ spoke to them "their eyes were opened" and "their hearts were burning" (Lk. 24:31-32). Christ opened their inner eye; the veil of ignorance fell away, and they could recognize Christ. The same thing happened to St. Paul on the way to Damascus. Christ's special and drastic intervention in his life made him temporarily blind, but he opened his inner eye to see the Truth in all its details. The Upanisadic statement: "All shine after him who really shines; all that shines are enlightened by his light" (*Kaṭha Up.* II.2.15) is very much applicable to Christ's guruship.

12.4. Christ: Master, Mediator and Redeemer

Christ is more than a teacher and master; he is the saviour and the only mediator of salvation and liberation. "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture" (Jn. 10:9). "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (Jn. 14:6). "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn. 8:36). "I have come to save the world" (Jn. 12:47).

There is therefore a subtle but vital difference between the Indian Gurus and Christ the Guru. One of the criticisms leveled against the classical Indian spiritualities, such as the Upanisadic or Yoga spiritualities, is that they lack the idea of divine grace. God has no role to play in the journey of the spiritual aspirant to perfection and liberation. S/he by her/his own efforts, by torturing the body, by controlling the passions and senses and thus purifying the mind should attain salvation. But in the Bhakti tradition the concept of grace is very much there. God

hears the cries of his devotees and comes to their help with his grace. In fact, God only helps those who take refuge in him to discover his/her divine nature. God does not give anything additional. But the Christian concept of grace is that it is a free gift of God to worthy and purified souls. The same is valid by the same degree in the case of Gurus. They enlighten the disciples only in so far as they make the disciples capable of discovering their original, pure and pristine nature, which is not touched by ignorance and the accompanying bondage and other maladies. Christ on the other hand freely gives his grace and blessing to his devotees making them worthy of God's kingdom.

A parallel to Christ in Hinduism would be Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā*. Hinduism venerates him as the full incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, and therefore as God. He is depicted as the divine Guru in the most popular and widely read sacred text of Hinduism, the *Gītā*. Like Christ he also said: "Renouncing all your duties (*karmas*), take refuge in me alone. I shall save you from all sins. Do not grieve" (XVIII.66). However, the subtle difference between the idea of salvation in Christianity and Hinduism should be taken into account here too.

Hinduism recognizes no fall in/of the human nature, and therefore, there is no need of a saviour. Humans in embodied existence are in bondage due to *karma*. The doctrine of *karma* and rebirth teaches that each action produces a result, a good result if the action is good, and bad result if the action is evil. These results are to be enjoyed or suffered by the agent in this life or in the life to come. Our life, existential environments and personal attributes are therefore the sum total of all past actions. This doctrine has, as is evident, an inherent fatalism in it, but at the same time it calls for responsible action for annihilating the results of *karma* and thus breaking the chain of rebirths. There is no need of saviour for this; it is to be carried out by each seeker. God and Guru may help in this process. But in Christianity the fallen nature of humans is redeemed by the incarnation and salvific act of Christ.

Mention has already been made to the two types of wisdom/knowledge, namely, the lower knowledge (*aparā vidyā*) and the higher or supreme knowledge (*parā vidyā*). Christ is the bestower and provider of both. By his preaching, teaching, actions and signs he leads his disciples to the lower knowledge. And by his grace and power he proffers the supreme wisdom and salvation.

Christ's words and teachings are not only words and wisdom of a Guru; they are God's words, and therefore, words of the sacred scriptures. Indian philosophy, as mentioned earlier, recognizes basically three means for right knowledge. The third is verbal testimony (*śabda*). This again is divided into two, namely, the divine word/testimony (*vaidika-śabda*) and human testimony (*laukika-śabda*) of a trustworthy person. The divine testimony is contained in the sacred texts, and gives us knowledge about supra normal and supernatural realities. Human testimony, being the words of a trustworthy person (*āpta-vākya*) gives knowledge of things and events, which we have not directly known or experienced. The words of Christ, the divine Guru, are both. They contain divine wisdom and human knowledge.

13. Conclusion

All religions and philosophies of Hinduism, for that matter, all the religions of India, give paramount importance to the role of an enlightened Guru in the process of sanctification and liberation of spiritual seekers. To drive home this point emphatically, sometimes Guru is depicted as God or like God. For Christians Christ is the only and unique Guru; all the human Gurus are but weak images and pale shadows of that divine Master. Let me conclude this essay with a Sanskrit verse in praise of Guru:

*dhyānamūlam guror mūrti, puṣpamūlam guror pādāṁ /
mantramūlam guror vākyaṁ, mokṣamūlam guror kṛpā //*

"The person of the Guru is object of meditation, the feet of the Guru are objects of worship, the words of the Guru provide the mantra and the grace of Guru leads to liberation".

Devotion to the Lord in the Light of the Bhakti Sūtras

G. Gispert Sauch

Gispert Sauch makes a theological analysis of Naradabhaktisutra, a spiritual classic of 10th century. This beautiful little book describes the characteristics of a devotee's ardent love for God: renunciation, surrender, humility, peace, joy etc. The devotee is not only a person totally transparent to the Divine, but also a channel of grace in the life of the people. Much of this is applicable to the person and teaching of Jesus. In the light of the Bhakti tradition Jesus can be understood as the object of bhakti as well as the subject of bhakti, the gracious Saviour as well as the liberative way of salvation. Gispert Sauch SJ teaches at Vidyajyoti, College of Theology, Delhi -110054.

Among the rich Indian sources that can inspire a reflection on Jesus Christ one may, not unreasonably, choose the bhakti tradition. Bhakti looks at Jesus from two different angles. One views him as the object of devotion, and comes to Jesus with the attitudes with which Indian bhaktas approach the *iṣṭa devatās*, whether Krishna or Rāma or Śiva or the Mother Goddesses. The other perspective looks at Jesus as the perfect bhakta of the Father, one who lived that life of "loving participation" which is the very meaning of 'bhakti' - sharing, choosing, loving. Both these approaches, Jesus as the object of bhakti and Jesus as the subject of bhakti, are intermingled in the following meditation.

I shall take as the jumping off point for my reflections a mediaeval Sanskrit text, less well known than the Gītā or the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a short didactic text that summarises much of the Indian tradition of devotion as it was lived around the 10th century. It also prepared the later development of bhakti literature and theology as they blossomed in the 12th-17th centuries through the great theologians like Rāmānuja

and his school, the bhaktas from Maharashtra and the North Indian and Bengali traditions. Vallabha and Chaitanya have a special importance during this period. The text I take was most probably composed earlier than the great movement of bhakti and bhakti theology of the middle ages. Its title is *Bhakti Sūtras*, and it could have been written soon after the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. There are in fact two sets of Bhakti Sūtras, more or less contemporary, one attributed to Śāṇḍilya and another to the legendary Nārada. Śāṇḍilya's are more philosophical in approach, Nārada's more ascetic and spiritual. They have an obvious parallelism suggesting a common tradition. I am using the latter, with which I am more familiar.

One need not be distracted by the name to which the text is attributed. Although the name Nārada occurs among the Rishis as the composer of a few Vedic hymns, in popular Indian culture Nārada is a mythological semi-divine figure, a well-known teacher and a model of devotion. But he also specializes in engineering family quarrels, reputedly with the purpose of leading its members to forgiveness, humility and greater devotion. He is also the patron of music and the inventor of the *vīṇā* (lute). But none of these characteristics has anything to do with the text of the Bhakti Sūtras, that were simply attributed to a name that was popular among the devotees of the period. The author is really an anonymous guru who had good acquaintance with the devotional literature of the time, specially the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, much spiritual sensitivity and common sense, and ability to put his teaching into simple Sanskrit aphorisms or sūtras, easily understandable and rich in spiritual insight. The text is short, 84 sūtras covering four or five pages in translation.

Before we get into the text I want to make it clear what I intend to do. For twenty-five years I have meditated on this text and taught it to our students. I am aware of its original context and some of its presuppositions. I find it is a pearl of spiritual literature, "perhaps," said Johanns already in 1930, "the best treatise on divine love" (*To Christ through the Vedanta*, vol. II, Bangalore: UTC, 1996, p. 388).

I know it can be fully understood only in its cultural, religious and historical context and it is this context that offers the main clues for a deepening of the text. But all great literature has within itself potentialities that grow in new circumstances. It can speak powerfully across

geographical, linguistic, cultural and religious frontiers. Reading does not consist in capturing a ready-made meaning but in creating a meaning where the text of the author and the pre-understanding of the reader work together to bring forth a new reality. I am doing a *re-reading* of the Sūtras, and doing it from the perspective of my Christian faith. Every re-reading means newness. And re-reading is part of every culture. This is *a* re-reading, not *the* only re-reading possible. Surely others can be done and have been done. Johannis did his own re-reading of this text seventy-five years ago. I do it differently for I do not share his theological perspective that saw this text merely "as an illustration of natural religion" (ibid.). I think it is an expression of the life of supernatural grace offered by God to all who seek truth and justice with a sincere heart. I shall point out in the text some places where I perceive more powerfully the influence of the Spirit of the risen Christ. My meditation therefore does not deny the value of the original meaning of the text in so far as we can discover it: it rather builds upon it from within my specific faith.

After the opening sūtra, the Nārada Bhakti Sūtras offer us a first description of the nature of devotion. If we translate this opening text literally, with attention to grammar and gender, it should read like this:

(Bhakti) is of the nature of the supreme love for It (*tasmin*) - its essence is immortal life (*amṛta*) - obtaining Which (*or Whom - yat*), a person becomes perfect (*siddha*), becomes immortal (*amṛta*), becomes satisfied (*tṛpta*); attaining Which (*Whom*), one does not long for anything, does not regret (*śocati*) anything, does not hate (*dveṣti*), does not find pleasure (*ramate*) [elsewhere], does not become mighty (*utsāhī*); knowing Which (*Whom*), one becomes overjoyed (*matta*), one is supported (*stabdha*), one rests in the Self (*ātmārāma*). (2-6)

We notice at once that the name of the Object of supreme love (*prema*) is not mentioned. "Nārada" is not sectarian. Later in the text he (or she?) uses a couple of times the word Bhagavān and once Íśvara, both derived from the bhakti traditions, Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva. There is also a passing reference to the "little gopis" which would suggest devotion to Krishna, but this name or any of its many synonyms does not appear in our text. Consciously or unconsciously, the author seems to avoid specific divine names. Even the gender of the Supreme Object of love is not mentioned in the text translated above, as of the two correlative pronouns that refer

to this Object (*tasmin, yat*) the first could grammatically be either neuter or masculine, while the second is neuter. What we do know is that "It" is loved with a love supreme and produces a state both of total satisfaction and fulfillment, and of detachment from everything else. Should we recall here that Jesus is not reported to have used the Tetragrammaton but referred to the Divine simply as Abba?

The parenthetical clause in the text above goes a step further. It looks at love not merely from the perspective of the creature loving the Supreme Reality, but from the perspective of its true essence (*svarūpa*, as distinct from *rūpa* or nature in the first sentence): its proper essence is immortality. *Amṛta* is a rich Vedic word standing both for the drink or food of Immortality and for Immortality itself, or the Life of the Gods, Eternal Life, a Life beyond death. It is the final goal sought in the famous Upanisadic prayer, *asato mā sad gamaya, tamaso mā jyotir gamaya, mṛtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya* "lead me from death to Immortality" (BA Up 1.3.28). *Amṛta* was churned up from the depths of the ocean at the great churning of creation, but was then selfishly appropriated by the gods who refused to share it with mortals. The way of bhakti or love, devotion, makes that Immortal life available to humans, for God is love!

The nature of this love is explained in the next section where bhakti is shown as different from *kāma* ('love of concupiscence') for it includes a sense of *nirodha*, 'control' (a word also applied to the control of the mind in the definition of Yoga, YS 1.1.2). As in the 'Principle and Foundation' of St Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises, *nirodha* involves total consecration (*nyāsa*) to the Supreme Reality, i.e., a behaviour which is perfectly agreeable to It, and an indifference to anything else, except that one must keep the scriptural injunctions and carry on secular activities necessary for one's livelihood (7-14). In the later tradition of Vallabha and other authors, *nirodha* will acquire a much denser theological meaning: it will primarily mean the condescension of the eternal Being when It limits Its infinitude to finiteness in Its concrete and historical avatāras or descents. To this divine *nirodha*, a revelation of generous love, there corresponds the human *nirodha* which means not wanting anything else but the divine pleasure: not just rituals, nor a spirituality merely of the word, nor even a stress on experience, but, in the words of Nārada, *tat-arpita-akhila-ācāratā, tat-vismaraṇe paramavyakūlatā*, "offering one's whole behaviour to It and [having]

supreme anxiety in any forgetfulness of It" (cf. sūtras 16-19 and some of the following ones). One is reminded of the total orientation of Jesus to the Kingdom of the Father. This orientation formed the centre of the personality of Jesus, and it involved the rejection of "anything not favouring it," in the words of Nārada. This self-offering of the whole life of Jesus to the Divine purpose must remain central in any authentic Christology, any true understanding of Jesus the Son.

Here the Sūtrakāra introduces to the model of the "little Gopīs" (21), well known to the Indian reader. For him as for many commentators of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, in their littleness, rustic ignorance and spiritual immaturity the Gopīs are best models of faith or devotion. They have nothing of what they can bring to God but their nakedness. Truly like little children they can count only on love, and indeed a love that is not in them very refined. What counts is really the love of Krishna for them. Immediately after mentioning the little Gopīs the author reminds the seeker of authentic devotion that what is characteristic of the Gopīs is not only the love with which they seek Krishna, but also that their love does not forget the majesty (*māhātmya-jñāna*) of the Divine Reality. Bhakti is truly humble. It maintains a sense of reverence. When it grows it must exclude any self-seeking. The essence of authentic love consists in seeking the pleasure of the Other: *tatsukhasukhitva*, in the pithy expression of sūtra 24: the state of being happy (*sukhitva*) by the happiness (*sukha*) of the Other. "My food and my drink is to do the will of my Father," said Jesus.

The divine nature of love, suggested above in sūtras 2 and 3, is further articulated in sūtras 24, 30 and 51ff. Strictly speaking bhakti is not a means to salvation, but salvation itself: *phalarūpatvāt*, "because its nature is that of the fruit." *Gratia inchoatio gloriae*, the old scholastics used to affirm. Grace is not just a ticket to heaven, but the very seed of our eternal existence in God. The Sūtras specify precisely that this existence in God is love itself, which is totally different from human values. This is spelt immediately in sūtra 27 where we cannot fail to recognize the evangelical voice of Jesus: "For God hates pride and loves lowliness" (*īśvarasya api abhimāna-dveṣitvāt dainya-priyatvāt ca*). "Unless you become like the little child you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven," Jesus told his disciples. Do not his words find an echo in the Indian sūtra? Does not the sūtra help us to capture the nature of love that was in Jesus and which formed the core of his personality? For by his option

for the lowly and the poor he did indeed reveal to the world what the Divine choices are. One could say that this sūtra summarizes the beatitudes of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus himself, the crucified one, the one who was totally poor because he emptied himself, is loved by the Father and chosen to be the heart and essence of human history.

Mortal creatures that we are, we all desire to obtain a share in this divine love which is Immortal life. Surely the sūtras tell us that we need renunciation and detachment: all spiritual traditions agree on that. Also that we need constant prayer. But the most important means of salvation is the touch of divine grace (*kṛpā*). Literally, "Principally, only by the grace of the great one (*mahat*) or a trace of the grace of the Bhagavān - 38). Divine grace is communicated through personal contact with graced persons, the truly 'great people', at times called the 'good ones' we meet in *satsanghas*, 'the meeting of the good'. (In the myth Nārada is reputed to have been converted by the charismatic *satsangha* in his house.) Jesus is eminently the Great and Good human being in whom divine grace becomes manifest flowing into all who come in contact with him. Luke records it for us: "Power came out from him and healed all of them" (6:19). For there is no separation between the Father and the Son He engenders: *tasmin taj-jane bheda-abhāvāt* (41). "I am in the Father and the Father in me," the Johannine *mahāvākya* reminds us constantly. So Jesus is really the one who not only has crossed (*tarati*) himself the world of *samsāra* and evil, but also thereby "causes the others to cross it" (*sah lokān tārāyati* - 50)!

One cannot define love (51). One must taste it (52), but true love shines in the worthy person (53), eminently so in Jesus. Such love is an ever-growing dynamic power, but at the same time it needs constant discernment. Not any one who shouts 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven but the one who fulfils the will of the Father. The discernment of *bhakti* is not difficult: it is internal to the very experience of love, the nature of which is peace and supreme inner joy (*śānti-rūpāt parama-ānanda-rūpāt ca* - 60), says our author. Does not St Paul too tell us that the signs of the Spirit are love, joy, peace (Gal 5:22)? Does not St Ignatius teach us that for people who are on the way of love the good Spirit is known by its effects of joy, peace and consolation in the soul? This is how he himself had started discernment during his convalescence at the Loyola home. Do not therefore our own sources invite us to see Jesus eminently as a man in whom love had the form of

peace and joy, a man of the Spirit? Have we separated too much the life of the Spirit from the historical experience of Jesus?

However, authentic love does not consist only of inner tranquility and bliss. One must be involved in the world wherein love has historical consequences. Bhakti is not primarily the religion of renouncers, but the religion of the lay men and women of the world, of soldiers in their battle field, of farmers in their sowing, of women who every day go to the well for water, to the market for purchases, to the kitchen for cooking, and who sweep the house in search of the lost coin. This is stressed in the last section of the Bhakti Sūtras dealing with the *ekantin bhaktas*, the school of single-minded monotheists who were also charismatics of the Spirit. Their characteristic way of life involved renunciation not of the world but of anti-values: of "distinctions based on caste, learning, beauty, family, wealth, occupation, etc." (72). They are not people of controversy and many words but rather of experience and unfailing dedication. They are people who are not obsessed, as many of our contemporaries are, by the attractions of sex, wealth or secularism (63). They rather obey the Scriptures and put them into practice (75).

They typify the classical cardinal virtues of the Indian tradition, i.e., *ahimsā, satya, śauca, dayā, āstikya* (pacifism, truth, purity, compassion, belief), etc. (78). Indeed, Jesus embodies in himself these five cardinal virtues. Bhaktas like Jesus Christ are sacraments of the Divine Presence and sources of all sacredness. Their lives, their presence, their memory, their faith "make places holy places, make works good works, make scriptures sacred scriptures of truth" (69). In other words, not what comes from or is outside defiles or sanctifies a person, but what proceeds from a heart, corrupted by hatred or purified by love. The reason for the sanctifying role of the bhaktas is simply that they are "full of It" (*tatmayāh* - 70), i.e. of the Divine presence, because they belong to It (*yatah tadīyāh* - 73), just as Jesus belonged to the Father. We are not surprised therefore that at the birth of the great bhakta Jesus literally *modante pitarah, nṛtyanti devatāh, sanāthā ca iyam bhūh bhavati* (71), "the ancestors rejoice, the angels dance and this earth becomes united to its Lord."

To sum up: Jesus shows us how true bhakti is lived, for by him really *sarvadā sarvabhāvena niścintaiḥ Bhagavān eva bhajanīyah* (79), "always and in all ways God is worshipped with one's whole heart, freed from all other concerns." Only total love (*sarva-bhāva*) can reveal God.

If we do this there is no doubt that however much we live in obscurity, however distant God and his designs seem to be, "the Lord being worshipped will very soon be manifested and will transform us with the experience of him" (80 - *sah kīrtiyamāṇah śīghram eva āvir bhavati anubhāṇvayati ca bhaktān*). The author uses a beautiful causative verb, *anubhāṇvayati* meaning both to cause to be and to bring about an experience. St Ignatius says something similar in the Spiritual Exercises. If we are faithful in prayer we come to the consolation, the experience of God, without delay. Being the manifestation of God Jesus has the power (the causative verb!) to make the bhaktas experience the Father.

The original text of the Sūtras seems to have concluded by making twice a strange affirmation using a rare word for the Divine Reality: *Trisatyasya bhaktir eva garīyasī, bhaktir garīyasī*, "Devotion to the Trebly-Truthed is the greatest" (81). *Tri-satya* (the ancient orthography was *tri-ṣatya*) used to be applied to the Gods, had the meaning, according to commentators and dictionaries, of being truthful in thought, word and deed, or in past, present and future. I am not sure of the origin of the word. Whatever be its connotation in late Vedic literature or the meaning "Nārada" gives to this word, it was very rarely used in his time. Can we forgive the Christian if she or he gives the sūtra a Trinitarian connotation? At any rate, this is truly the inner function of Jesus: to reveal to us the strongest love of the Triune God for every human being and for the whole of creation, and to show us the way of devotion to the Trinity through loving service.

Vidyajyoti,

Delhi

Avatāra in the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa

Subhash Anand

Bhāgavata-Purāṇa , the classical text of India's bhakti tradition, describes the various forms of the descent of God into the world in order to save the world from a particular fall. Of all these Krishna is the supreme form of the divine descent. Subhash Anand makes it clear that the actions of Krishna are described in the form of a divine play (leela): there is no real immersion of the divine Saviour in the human predicament. God does not really suffer with the humans. In the case of Jesus Christ on the other the history of human suffering has become the story of God's suffering with us. The Word really became flesh; God reveals himself through the crucified Christ. Subhash Anand teaches philosophy at Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune - 411014.

The *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* has had a very great influence on the religious life of India. It has not only been studied by different proponents of Vedānta, but has also been used extensively by popular preachers of the cult of Kṛṣṇa. It was composed around 900 CE. Some suggest that its roots are in South India, since its religious views are so similar to those of the Vaishnava saints of Tamilnad. Kṛṣṇa is the center of this text, and the popularity of this playful lover-god in India today has its roots in this text. Kṛṣṇa is considered the supreme *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

The idea of *avatāra* is central to the cult of Kṛṣṇa. The different episodes in his life have inspired devotees, poets, artists and theologians. This explains why the *Bhāgavata* opens with a group of sages requesting a wandering bard to narrate to them the wonderful deeds of Kṛṣṇa (1.1.18). The *Bhāgavata* concludes by saying that from the beginning to the end it is permeated with the exhilarating odour of the story of the Lord, and that listening to this story is bound to free the devotees from all other attachments (12.13.11).

God is totally beyond our comprehension, totally beyond our reach. In order to reveal himself to us, he freely comes down to this earth (11.11.28). He is essentially bodiless, but manifests himself through a body (10.10.34). In the *avatāra* the supreme Spirit assumes a human form (9.23.30). While the *avatāra* is a revelation for his devotee, it is also a veiling of the divine, so that in spite of the great deeds performed by him, people take him to be an ordinary mortal (1.1.20). But through the *avatāra* God comes within the reach of those who really want to find him (10.9.19).

The coming down of God to this earth becomes possible through his *māyā*, his mysterious power (1.11.35), his power of creation (1.2.30). Ordinary humans are born in this world as a result of their past actions, but the descent of God is totally a gratuitous deed (4.8.57). This explains why an *avatāra* is so different from all other humans: he remains unaffected by the ups and downs of life. Separation from those who are near and dear to him does not sadden him. If at times he seems to be distressed, it is only because his life is meant to teach humans how they ought to live (5.19.5). The fact is that he cannot be distanced from his loved ones (5.19.6). In like manner, when the young women of Kṛṣṇa's village use all their seductive charm and amorous skill to ensnare him, he remains unmoved (1.11.36). The *Bhāgavata* even speaks of Kṛṣṇa as *kapaṭa-mānuṣa*, a man only in appearance (1.1.20). This expression is found only once in the *Bhāgavata*, but it neatly sums up how the concept of *avatāra* is understood. Though not really human, the *avatāra* goes about behaving like one of us (10.23.36). He is much more like an actor on the stage (1.15.35).

Just as the concept of *māyā* is linked with God's creative and revelatory act, so too the concept of *līlā* is used to explain creation (1.10.240 and the descent of God (1.2.34; 3.5.7). While *māyā* evokes the sense of mystery, *līlā* suggests an effortless play, an over-flowing of joy, a totally selfless act evoking wonder. In fact the descent of God as *avatāra* is similar to the performance by a dramatic troupe: many characters are involved, some on the stage, others behind the stage. When the earth complains to Viṣṇu that she is being burdened and harassed by sinful people, Viṣṇu tells her that he himself will come to her aid, but he will not come alone. The *devas*, celestial women, the serpent on whose coils Viṣṇu reclines, will all come down to the earth in different forms in order to be part of the *līlā* in which Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa

will be the hero (10.1.21-25). Viṣṇu himself orders his creative power (*yoga-māyā*) to be part of this drama by being born as a daughter to Nanda and Yaśodā (10.2.7-12).

The belief that the descent of God is a mysterious play does not mean that there is no purpose to be achieved. We have already seen that Kṛṣṇa comes precisely to free the earth of sinful rulers. So by every *avatāra* some definite purpose has to be fulfilled. As it happens in many communities, the ideals that motivated people in the past are forgotten. People put aside the sense of right and wrong. Already in the *Bhagavad-gītā* Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna that whenever there is a moral crisis he comes to help the righteous and to establish the rule of *dharma* (4.7-8). So in the *Bhāgavata*, the concern for *dharma* is one of the reasons for the *avatāra* (9.24.56). The Lord may come to teach men the way of perfection (5.6.12). When through an *avatāra* God crushes the forces of evil, then he not only brings comfort to men, but also alleviates the pain of other living creatures (1.8.43).

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of an *avatāra* may have a cosmic significance. Appearing as a wild-boar (*varāha*), the Lord lifts up the earth from the depths of the ocean (3.13).

In ancient India there were many local cults, some having a totemist framework. The half-human and totally animal *avatāras* may indicate a stage in the development of Hinduism when the doctrine of *avatāra* enabled the dominant cult to absorb totems and other local deities in such a way that these still had a place of honour within the new frame without threatening monotheism. This was possible precisely because these deities were seen as different appearances of one and the same God. An attempt is made to coopt the Buddhist and Jaina traditions too. The Buddha himself is included in a long list of *avatāras*, but his coming is to mislead those who do not accept Viṣṇu (1.3.24). The sage who is associated with the Sāṃkhya tradition is also roped in. But, since this tradition is mentioned in the early Hindu texts, e.g., in the *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad*, Kapila is shown in a positive life (1.3.10). He taught his mother, and also others to come after her, the path that will surely lead them to the attainment of the highest goal of their life (3.33.5). He provides her with that knowledge of the Spirit which will enable her to cut assunder the knot of ignorance in her heart and also in the hearts of others (3.24.4). The Lord also appears as Rṣabha, a Jaina teacher of great repute to impart spiritual wisdom to his family (5.2-6).

There are passages in the *Bhāgavata* where the doctrine of *avatāra* is linked with the theory of creation as articulated in the *Puruṣa-sūkta* in the *Rg-veda* (10.90). The *Puruṣa* is the first (*ādya*) *avatāra* (2.6.41). He has within him the three *guṇas* in a harmonious balance (2.6.31)¹. When the descent is specifically associated with a particular *guṇa*, then we have the three *guṇa-avatāras*, responsible for the creation, sustenance and destruction of the world (3.7.28). When *rajas* is dominant we have *Brahmā* who creates the world. Viṣṇu, in whom *sattva* is dominant, sustains the world and Śiva has *tamas* as his characteristic and so he brings the world to its end (1.2.23).

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The water falling from the sky as rain gives birth to small streams and mighty rivers. So too the infinite Viṣṇu can reveal himself in many different *avatāras* (1.3.26). As we noted, some *avatāras* have a human form, while others have animal forms. All these are only partial revelations, a small particle (*amśa*) of the glory of the Lord, but Kṛṣṇa is the Lord himself (“*kṛṣṇastu bhagavān svayam*,” 1.3.28). One commentator suggests that all the *avatāras* are a partial manifestation of one or the other aspects of the divine, but in Kṛṣṇa there is the manifestations of the divine in all his splendour. On the other hand, we do come across some passages where Kṛṣṇa too is considered to be a partial *avatāra* (2.7.26; 10.26.23). This should not surprise us because the divine splendour in all its fullness can never be revealed, precisely because it is totally transcendent (10.3.44).

Among the different reasons for the coming of an *avatāra*, the *Bhāgavata* gives importance to one: the Lord comes as an *avatāra* to enable his devotees to revel in narrating and hearing the story of the wonderful deeds done by the *avatāra*. This becomes clear from the words Kunti addresses to Kṛṣṇa:

Still others hold that you were born to do mighty deeds, worthy of being heard and remembered by those suffering in this world due to actions inspired by ignorance and passion. Those persons alone who constantly listen to, sing, recite to others, remember and praise your deeds, very soon see your lotus-feet, which bring about a cessation of the stream of birth and death (1.8.35-36)².

Kṛṣṇa is not merely a past event, but a mystery ever present in the heart of the devotees. Hence one way of understanding the significance of the doctrine of *avatāra* is by seeing the message conveyed through the different episodes in the life of Kṛṣṇa. The *Bhāgavata* devotes two full books to Kṛṣṇa (bks 10 and 11 - almost one third of the entire text). If Kṛṣṇa is the Lord himself, then in some way the stories of the other *avatāras* are also the stories of Kṛṣṇa.

The birth of Kṛṣṇa is meant not only for humans but for the whole of creation. The earth seems to feel the touch of his feet when he steps on

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it. The sky becomes clear and myriads of stars look like tiny lamps lit to welcome the heavenly guest. The rivers flow gently, and their water is clear as chrystal. The many coloured flowers evoke a festive feeling. Trees bend down with the weight of fully ripe fruits. Birds sing with gusto. The whole earth seems to be alive and in a festive mood, rejoicing at the birth of its maker and saviour (10.3.1-4).

The adventures of Kṛṣṇa as a child fill the onlookers with awe and wonder, inviting them to silent contemplation. Even though he is seen as a child, he is more than a man (1.1.20; 3.5.16). A demoness tries to kill him by offering her poisoned breast to him. He sucks out her life (10.6.17). In his sleep he kicks a cart and it turns upside down (10.7.10). But the most charming episodes of his childhood have given him the name Butter-thief. He was very fond of butter and would steal it when nobody was about the place. Once when Yaśodā caught him redhanded, he denied it and, to convince her that he was not telling lies, he opened his mouth. Yaśodā sees the whole of creation therein (10.7.35-36). To prevent him from repeating his prank, she tries to tie him up. The piece of rope she has is not long enough, and it does not become long enough even when she keeps on joining more and more pieces. She is drenched with sweat. Seeing her sad plight Kṛṣṇa is moved with pity and allows himself to be tied (10.9.19-20).

There are similar episodes in his adult life, but the *rāsa-līlā*, his dance with the milkmaids of his village, is the most beautiful and significant of all. All these young women want him to be their beloved, and so they make a vow. On its completion they go to bathe in a river. Kṛṣṇa comes quietly, takes their clothes and climbs up a tree so that he can have a good look at all of them. When they realize what has happened, remaining neck-deep in the water, they pleade with him to return their clothes. To cajole him they tell him that, as his servants, they are prepared to do whatever he demands from them. He tells them to come out of the river and get their clothes. They have no choice, but as they come out they use their hands to hide their nakedness. Kṛṣṇa tells them that they must join their hands over their head and bow to him. Once again he has the last word (10.22.7-27). Though in his *avatāra*, God comes to us he remains the Lord. Only when we acknowledge this and are prepared to surrender everything, strip ourselves naked of all creaturely attachments, do we become worthy of his grace. The *Bhāgavata* insists that the descent

of God is a sign of his benevolence (5.3.20). He is full of compassion for us, and to reveal this he comes down to us (3.2.15; 10.66.5). Thus the account of the life of Kṛṣṇa, starting from his birth, is a 'history of salvation'.

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By way of conclusion let me make some reflections on the doctrine of *avatāra* as found in the *Bhāgavata*. God is totally beyond all change (8.3.8). It is this world, constituted by the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*, that is constantly changing. The Lord himself is beyond the *guṇas* (*nirguṇa*), and he assumes these for the creation, preservation and consummation of the world (2.5.18). Creation is totally 'outside' and 'distinct' from God. Hence the pain and suffering of his creatures cannot really affect him. Even an *avatāra* remains beyond the ups and downs of our life. The idea of remaining unchanged in spite of creating this universe is also conveyed by the metaphor of play (*līlā*). To us this universe looks so great and wonderful, but God brings it into existence by a mere act of his will, effortlessly (1.5.6). The metaphor of play has a certain positive content: in all his activity God has no selfish motive. However, it seems

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to minimize the significance of created reality, particularly of our pain and suffering. In relation to the doctrine of *avatāra*, this metaphor distances the *avatāra* from us, even though he may appear to be one of us. This way of looking at life can lead to some very questionable conclusions. This approach is based on a dualistic understanding of human existence and this confusion is further compounded by accepting the traditional and more popular version of Advaita.⁵ Let me illustrate this by quoting Ramana Maharshi, a religious figure of our times well accepted by the traditional Hindus:

You were not conscious of the world and its sufferings while you were asleep, but you are now that you are awake. Continue in the state in which you are not affected by such things. When you are not aware of this world, that is to say, when you remain as the Self in the state of sleep, its sufferings do not affect you. Therefore turn inwards and seek the Self and there will be an end both of the world and its miseries. . . the world and its sufferings are not real⁶.

This is precisely the type of religion that those who are responsible for so much injustice in our society are eager to propagate.

If on the other hand we have experienced a liberationist reading of Christian Scripture in the last century it is precisely because God takes our pain very seriously. This is why the Christian tradition has consistently rejected a Docetistic Christology. In Jesus our pain becomes the pain of God.

Jnanadeepa Vidyapeetha
Pune

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5. I have reasons to believe that the popular interpretation of Śankara's Advaita, sometimes appropriated even by Hindu university professors, does not do justice to the great mystic. But I cannot substantiate this here.
 6. Ramana Maharshi, *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, ed. E. Osborne, Tiruvanamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1960, pp. 10-11.

Advaita and Theosis, an Exploration into Upanishads

V. F. Vineeth

One dominant aspect of the Indian classical spirituality is the journey to one's own interiority, where one finds God as one's own innermost Self. The Christian Orient from the beginning of Christianity has done a similar search and found the abiding Spirit of Christ as the "uncreated energy of God" operating in us. They understood the human beings as pneumatoter, the bearer of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ as the pneumatoter par excellence. Francis Vineeth pursues the question: Are there not converging lines in the depth experiences of advaita and theosis. V. Francis Vineeth is the founder of Vidyavanam Ashram, Bannarghatta, Bangalore.

I. Introduction

Yoga and interiority are intimately inter-related. Yoga is the *sadhana* to reach our own interior depth and interiority is the *sadhya* that is searched for. Spirituality is a journey to our own interiority. What is interiority? It is the depth dimension of our own being and is of the nature of consciousness. In fact a search for interiority is a search into our own consciousness. We have several layers of consciousness. We are aware of the world around us, of our senses and body. We are also aware of our thoughts and all what goes through our mind. Beyond the thinking mind our consciousness can penetrate into the divine that is within us. God abides in our hearts in the form of consciousness. This we call Spirit. For us Christians, this is the Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, abiding within us as the Spirit of God, the life giver. Our search for interiority should finally reach this inner depth of our being where we meet God not as the object of our thinking but as the very inner life giver, an innermost agent who transforms us, divinises

us and glorifies us. In other words, our innermost interiority is God's very consciousness within us, which should be experienced as an ultimate subject, a spiritual or divine principle of life, active and operative within us. We have to experience him as he really is and not convert him into the object of our mind, which is a lower level of understanding.

In this article I am trying to present how to enter into the deeper levels of our consciousness and come in touch with the Spirit and experience him as the subject rather than the object of our mind. India is one of the countries in the world, which has made a deep search into this abiding Spirit. India has also proposed a theory of yoga which in its various ways can help us make this journey.

II. Yoga and Interiority from an Indian Perspective

II.1. What is Yoga?

The word *yoga* comes from the root *yug-yog* which means to unite. Yoga is a kind of union, union between senses and mind, mind and spirit (soul), and finally the union between the human self and the divine Self. Apart from the threefold yoga as *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana*, all of which are *margas*, paths to spiritual realization, the *Gita* explains yoga also in the following way. The wisdom of yoga consists in the practice of a theory or a vision-statement that is explained to you (2:39); yoga, when practiced, brings about equanimity (*samatvam yoga uchyate*: 2:48); it is an art of doing work without being attached to its own material results (*karmasu kausalam*: 2:50); and above all it is understood as concentration in perfect equilibrium (2:53); and by which one finds one's delight in the Self by the Self (*atmani-eva atmana tushtah*: 2:55). That is, the human consciousness, enlightened by and residing in the divine consciousness, remains peacefully happy. This is the result of yoga.

Is it a doctrine of passivity? In the *Gita*, certainly it is not. After saying this doctrine of equanimity, Krishnan urges Arjuna to go and fight in the real battle field, but, being fixed in yoga (*yogasthah*), remaining the same in success and failure (2:47).

Gita also speaks about *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana yoga*. *Karma yoga* is the yoga of action which is essentially selfless action for the betterment of the world. *Bhakti yoga* is one's own self surrender to the divine master and Lord whom the *bhakta*, devotee, loves and adores as the only Lord

of his/her heart. *Jnana yoga* is the realization of the divine within us. Meditation is considered to be the royal path for this realization process.

In short, we have to understand these three yogas as three dimensions or aspects which could characterize our mind and life-style. Thus the *karma yoga* points to our ability to perform actions as pure, selfless sacrifices offered to the Lord with a power of transcendence over everything that is not God and without any undue attachment. *Bhakti* is intense and deeply affectionate love with which the love, the soul, seeks her beloved whom she considers the only Lord of her life and performs an unconditional surrender of her whole life and aspirations to him and through him to everyone. *Jnana* in *jnana yoga* is to be understood not as academic knowledge or erudition, but as divine wisdom originating from God, enlightening and transforming the depth of human consciousness and consequently the mind and all realms of our knowledge.¹

Pathanjali's *yoga sutra* presents also a way to reach the inner depth of our own self through its eight steps. The first two steps are remote preparations for freeing the mind from inordinate tendencies (five *yamas*) and strengthening it on good patterns of behaviour (five *niyamas*). Then Pathanjali proposes the necessary steps of meditation. He starts with assuming a comfortable posture, proceeds to restoring the rhythm of the flow of life in our body (*pranayama*) and moves to silencing the senses (*parathyakara*) and mind (*dharana*) and entering into meditation and finally remaining one with what you meditate. One slowly becomes identified with the object of meditation and enters into unruffled serenity which is the real nature of genuine depth where now the soul rests. For believers it is God's very consciousness which is divinely serene, where the soul rests (*samadhi*). Instead of ecstasy, the Indian sage speaks of equanimity (*sama-dhi*) which is the result of reaching the depth.

II.2. Towards Understanding Interiority

The following classical text from *Brahadarnyaka Upanisad* gives us a clue towards the understanding of our journey to interiority:

In truth, this is the great, unborn Atman who is the spiritual element among the life powers. He dwells in that space within the heart, the

1. For further details confr. V.F. Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, Vidyavanam Publications, Bangalore, 1995, pp. 169-212.

Ordainer of all, the Lord of all, the ruler of all. He does not become greater by good works or less great by bad works. He is the Lord of all, the Ruler of all beings, the protector of all beings. He is the bridge that holds these words apart. It is he whom Brahmins desire to know through the study of the Vedas, through sacrifice and alms giving, through ascetic fervor and fasting (*Brahadarnyaka Up.* IV, 4, 22).

The great insight of our Indian seers is that there is a Self within our self, within our bodily self, and still deeper within our mental self and still deep down within our spiritual self or soul. And this Self or *atman* is our divine self whom we should know, not by senses, nor by mind, nor even by our finer consciousness, but by faith, that is, through the very eye of God hidden within us. A journey through interiority is made to dis-cover this *atman*, the ultimate Self within the different layers of our self-hood. In our journey to this *atman* we can really get stuck at any stage of our journey depending on the fervor we are led by in the layers of sense, mind or deeper consciousness. Everything, every finite dimension of our knowledge is accepted and yet is to be transcended, if we really want to come in touch with the divine Self within us. "In truth, this is great unborn *atman* who is the spiritual element among the life powers". Our oriental fathers of the church went in search of the "uncreated energy" that moves our life and thought from within. A striking parallelism is seen here in this Indian text, obviously a tradition much more ancient than that of the Christian Orient, namely, a search into the 'unborn *atman*' of every human being. This unborn *atman* is the real Spirit. Here the search into the unborn is in fact the search into the uncreated. "He is the ordainer of all, the Lord of all, the ruler of all".

What we people call God is really sought here. The main difference in the Indian accent is that God is sought in the depth of one's own self and not as the object of one's own mind. Hence, the way of objectification is to be given up. Rather a way of search, submission and experience is sought after.

This *atman* is not attained by instruction or by intelligence or by learning. By him whom he chooses is the *atman* attained. To him the *atman* reveals his own being (*Katha Up.* II, 23).

Intelligence and learning is certainly good, and even praise worthy in the realm of study and research. But research cannot bring us nearer to

God; it can bring us to a caricature of God projected by our mind. For real knowledge of God we have to silence the mind, submit ourselves with utter humility and wait for the dawn of divine light. Divine light should be given by God himself. Hence the abiding *atman* who is in reality the divine eye within our consciousness has to choose us, shed his light on us, draw us into himself and enlighten us from within and guide our life. We receive this light through faith, when our 'third eye' is open. St. Ephrem an Asian theologian of 4th century, calls this the 'luminous eye'. Our inner eye becomes luminous with the light of revelation, which we believe that we have in abundance in and through Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit of Christ, breathed into us by the Lord, who awakens us when we listen to his words. "Without me you can do nothing".

Inner awakening is a great gift given to us by the Lord. One condition for this is proper disposition of mind. Already in the Gospel according to St. John Jesus says: "Those who want to do the will of God will understand what I say" (Jn. 6:). This means that without proper disposition none of us will come in touch with what the Lord really speaks to us, through words, symbols, or parables. The *Katha Upanisad* continues:

The one who has not turned away from wickedness, who has no peace, who is not concentrated, whose mind is restless - he cannot realize the *atman*, who is known by wisdom (*Katha Up.* II, 24).

To know the *atman* is to realize him. Real knowledge is becoming. There is no higher knowledge than that you become what you know. To this kind of realizational knowledge faith is the royal path. Faith is a deep inner response to the divine life given to us, which always contains our self-surrender along with it.

As oil in sesame seed, as butter in cream, as water in hidden springs, as fire in fire sticks, so is the *atman* grasped in one's own self when one searches for him in truth and with fervor (*Surya Up.* I,15).

Ascetic fervor, *tapas*, starts with the initial rays of awakening which the disciples who went to Emmaus felt as they were listening to the words of Jesus: "were not our hearts burning when he was explaining Scriptures to us?" *Tapas* then proceeds to deeper enlightenment and guides us to commitment and determination to peruse the path shown,

renounce everything else because the true treasure has been found and ends up in complete surrender and transformation.

The *sadhaka* keeps the awakened consciousness as a precious jewel in his/her heart and continuously meditate, lest the splendour of the divine light get dimmer and dimmer in the daily worries of our life. Hence, the text says:

One should meditate on the *atman* which consists of the spirit whose embodiment is life, whose form is light, whose essence is space, which changes its form at will, swift as thought, of true resolve and true stability; which contains all odors, all tastes, pervades all regions and encompasses the whole world, speechless and indifferent Like a grain of rice or barley or millet, like a tiny grain of millet, so is the golden Person within the *atman*. Like smokeless flame, greater than heaven, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the earth, greater than all beings, he is the *atman* of life, my own *atman*. On departing (from this world) I shall become that *atman*. He who has this confidence, he shall not waver. This was spoken by Sandilya and it is truly so (*Shatpatha Brahmana* X, 6,3, 2).

Meditation is said to be the royal path to divine wisdom and is known as *Brahma-vijnana-sadhana*. The golden means for divine wisdom is meditation, because what you meditate that you become. Here what is to be noted is the Spirit that is known is experienced as an ultimate subject, who really guides our life from within. This does not mean the divine spirit is continuously changing as my bodily or mentally activities are changing. But as spokes of a wheel are all held together in a hub, all layers of my life and their activities are finally propelled from this unmoving center of my life which is smaller than the smallest (cannot be deciphered by size) and bigger than the biggest (nor can it be measured by any creature). The text refers to the subtlety and immensity of the divine spirit abiding within us, as the "uncreated energy, source" of all my activities. It is something like the Word's action in the humanity of Christ, with a great difference that in ordinary human beings the word operate through our human person, where as in Jesus Christ actions proceed from the Word, the divine person in Christ and terminates in the human nature of Christ, with no medium of a human person in between. With this cardinal difference, the text really points to a super human experience, where God really becomes operative in us through his Spirit, sanctifying, transforming and divinizing us.

II. 3. *Search into the Subtler than the Subtle and the Greater than the Great*

Subtler than the subtle, greater than the great is the Self that is set in the cave of the (heart) of the creature. One beholds Him as being actionless and becomes freed from sorrow, when through the grace of the Creator he sees the Lord and His majesty (*Svetasvatara Up.* III. 20).

Here is outlined a search of a human soul for the transcendent and the immanent God who is greater than the great and subtler than the subtle. He is to be sought in the highest heavens and at the same time in the cave of one's own heart. The realizational knowledge of him, which is a kind of beholding rather than knowing, liberates us from sorrow and for this purpose grace of the same Lord is necessary. In a way various upanishads highlight different aspects of this text. The great transcendent God to be meditated upon in the stilled silence of the senses and sharp concentration of the mind is one who abides within one's own heart as the Ultimate Self. The Supreme Self within the human self is the core of the mystery of human existence. One who discovers this through *tapas* and fervor crosses over to life immortal. Our life is a journey to this immortality. Joyful yet austere formation, disciplined mind, committed life are necessary for this realization. In exploring into the mystery of this *atman-brahman* reality upanishads bring to light different aspects of the Ultimate Self as the one supremely transcendent, profoundly immanent, universally present, infinitely powerful and so on.

II. 4. *In Search of the Mystery of the Absolute*

Uddalaka Aruni, the father of Svetaketu instructs the boy about the ultimate truth and self of everything as follows:

Just as, my dear by one clod of clay all that is made of clay becomes known, the modification be only a name arising from speech while the truth is that it is just clay... Thus is that teaching (*Chand. Up.* VI. 4, 6).

Here the clay stands for brahman and all that is made of clay stands for the vast universe. The implication is that knowing brahman we know everything that is in the universe because they are made of a combination of name and form both of which have their origin from Brahman himself. *Namarupa*, name and form, is the central key to the upanishadic theory

of creation. Everything has proceeded from the infinite source of being assuming name and form, *nama* and *rupa*. *Nama* stands for the essential content of the being and *rupa* for its particular form. Every being is a combination of these two. Because both of them proceed from the Supreme Being, this Supreme is the one to be sought after, to be understood, to be realized. Hence, Uthalaka said:

In the beginning, my dear, this was being alone, one only without a second (*Chand. Up.* VI. 2, 1).

With this sentence we are invited to move towards the beginningless beginning of everything which is pure Being. Everything that exists here have their origin from this. The process of this One 'becoming many by assuming name and form' is described in detail with a mixture of mythical and philosophical thinking. The salient point that runs through this art of thinking is that the One who was in the beginning is the sole source of all beings, material and spiritual. Mystery surrounds Him, because as the Infinite One He is ever incomprehensible and ineffable. *Katha Upanishad* describes this unfathomable mystery as follows:

(The self) without sound, without touch and without form, undecaying, is likewise, without taste, eternal, without smell, without beginning, without end, beyond the great, abiding, by discerning that, one is freed from the face of death (*Katha Up.* I. 3,15).

The supreme Self is not an object of our thinking or of any sort of knowing. He is by nature the subject. The great question is how to know the knower. If we know him by making him an object of our knowing, the knower is known not as subject but as object. A real knowledge of knower is only possible by participating in the knowledge of the knower, i.e., by getting characterized by the very knowing of the knower himself. This means that while knowing him we put on the characteristics of the supreme Self, the Spirit, and know him as subject operating in us. This knowledge is realizational and not purely rational. As Paul in his epistle to Romans says: "God's very Spirit unites with our Spirit to declare that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16).

The supreme Self is to be sought not through senses, not through mind but through the very consciousness of the supreme imparted to us through faith. Mind and senses do play their role. But faith, as God's own light shining within us, is the real guide which takes us to the ultimate

subject of all our actions. The Lord said "I am the vine and you are the branches... Without me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). The branch exists in the vine and the vine operates through the branches. For Christians this text can be a clue to the understanding of the supreme Self as an abiding Self within us.

II. 5. *Inner Depth as the Abode of the Deathless Atman*

The transcendent God is beyond our reach. All our attempts of knowing him will be in vain, unless God himself reveals him to us. But the transcendent one, though he is absolutely incomprehensible and unapproachable, has deigned to condescend and dwell in our human hearts. He is therefore profoundly immanent. Hence, we are asked to discover him in our own selves.

He who dwells in all beings, yet is other than all beings, whom no beings know, whose body is all beings, who controls all beings from within, he is your self, the inner controller, the immortal (*Brah. Up.* III.7.15).

The Supreme Self abides within us as our inner controller and the ultimate Self. It is this Self that is to be experienced and realized. I have already said that the symbol of vine branches used by Jesus is a clue for a Christian understanding of this abiding Self. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* illustrates this through the story of a faithful seeker called Brgu who made this journey through several layers of awareness such as, of food, life, mind, pure consciousness and bliss. Each time his master told him: "Seek Brahman through *tapas*" (*Tait. Up.* III.1-6). In this story food stands for the awareness of the object or of the world, life for the beginning of the awareness of the self, mind for a higher awareness in mental level, consciousness for the beginning of divine awareness and bliss for the participation of the self in divine nature. Finally he reached *Atman*. We too have to make this journey. As awareness deepens our values change and we become more and more liberated. True wisdom is liberating and the wise leave behind both pain and pleasure alike.

Realizing through self-contemplation that primal God, difficult to be seen, deeply hidden, set in the cave of the heart, dwelling in the deep, the wise leave behind both pain and pleasure (*Katha. Up.* I. 2.12).

Divine wisdom is a gift of the Spirit and not the result of human thinking or argumentation. Reason can help us to make this way to divine

wisdom. But reason has its own limitations. Hence, reason gives way to faith. Faith is a response to a light from within, which forces me to accept the self-revealing God in history as well in the depth of my own being. Therefore, disposition of mind, a submissive mentality devoid of pride and egoism, is necessary to receive this divine wisdom. We do find the same principle declared by Jesus to the Jews who were questioning him and refusing to believe in him, when he said that only those who want to do the will of God will understand the meaning and veracity of his teaching (Jn. 7:17).

III. A Christian Search into the Holy Spirit Abiding within us

The Holy Spirit was spoken of in the Bible as breath (*ruah*). The symbol of breath and wind as life principle and moving power of God in the universe where originally used to express the Spirit. This corresponds also to the words used in other languages such as, *atman* in Sanskrit or *spiritus* in Latin. The idea was as the bodily breath is the sign and principle of bodily life, so a spiritual breath, which is consciousness or participation in divine consciousness is the life-giving principle of spiritual life. Though, according to Christian theology, all operations of God *ad extra* are considered to be the common work of all the three persons of the Trinity, by way of appropriation, our sanctification which includes our transformation to divine likeness is attributed to the Holy Spirit abiding within us.

III.1. *The Human Being is a Pneumatopher: the Bearer of the Holy Spirit*

In the life of Christ we see expressions such as "the Holy Spirit led him to the desert" (Mt.4:1) or "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Lk.4:18). Jesus Christ is certainly the *pneumatopher par excellence*. He breathed his Spirit into his disciples whom he qualified as the life-giver, the consoler, the advocate, the one who reveals all truths and condemns the world for its sinfulness. In all the expressions of Jesus we find this spirit is to be understood not as an object of our mind but as a subject, an agent who operates in and through us all his divine actions. Therefore, the oriental theology from the ancient days of Christianity called the human beings as the bearer of the Holy Spirit. The Indian use of the word *Atman*, the Self, is a pointer to us how the Holy Spirit is to be understood as our own inner most Self who breaths his spirit in and through us, demanding co-operation from our mind, senses and from all

our being. To illustrate this vision let us see a text from St. Basil (c. 330 - 379 A.D.) who is perhaps one of the ancient and the greatest exponent on the theme of the Holy Spirit in Christian faith.

Now the Spirit is not brought into intimate association with the soul by local approximation. How indeed could there be a corporeal approach to the incorporeal. The association results from the withdrawal of the passions which, coming afterwards gradually on the soul from its friendship to the flesh, have alienated it from its close relationship with God. Only then after a man is purified from the shame whose stain he took through his wickedness, and has come back again to his natural beauty, and as it were cleaning the Royal Image and restoring its ancient form, only thus is it possible for him to draw near to the Paraclete. And He, like the sun, will by the aid of thy purified eye show thee in Himself the image of the invisible, and in the blessed spectacle of the image thou shalt behold the unspeakable beauty of the archetype.

Through His aid hearts are lifted up, the weak are held by the hand, and they who are advancing are brought to perfection. Shining upon those that are cleansed from every spot, He makes them spiritual by fellowship with Himself. *Just as when a sunbeam falls on bright and transparent bodies, they themselves become brilliant too, and shed forth a fresh brightness from themselves, so souls wherein the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual, and send forth their grace to others.* Hence comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, apprehension of what is hidden distribution of good gifts, the heavenly citizenship, a place in the chorous of angles, joy without end, *abiding in God, the being made like to God, and highest of all, the being made God.* Such, then, to instance a few of many, are the conceptions concerning the Holy Spirit, which we have been taught to hold concerning His greatness, His dignity, and His operations, by the oracles of the Spirit themselves.² (Italics added)

2. "Booklet on the Holy Spirit", tr. B. Jackson; *Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, vol. VIII, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, n.d.), p. 25.

III.2. *Spirit is the Spirit of Christ*

Cyril of Alexandria (Bishop 412 - 444) writes in his book *De Trinitate*:

The Saviour says: "The Holy Spirit" and it is this Spirit who introduces Him and makes Him inhabit our souls. Through Him and in Him, He leads our nature back to its primitive state, that is to say, refashions us to His own proper likeness through sanctification... The Spirit is the perfect and natural image of the Son. *Having been formed according to this Spirit through sanctification, we put on the form of God.* It is this that the Apostle (Paul) tells us: "My children for whom I am in labour until Christ be formed in you." Christ is formed in us through the Holy Spirit who refashions us according to God... The Holy Spirit is then God who remakes in us the image of God; *not through any instrumental grace, but in giving Himself as a participation of the divine nature to those who are worthy.*³ (Italics added)

The recalling of the image of God from within us, in whose likeness we were created, may be understood as the beginning of an inner awakening. All human Beings are created in the image of God. By sin it was distorted and covered up by darkness. But it is still there. The Spirit of God breathed into us re-awakens this image, enlightens and beautifies it.

The Byzantine liturgy glorifies the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier on Monday of Pentecost:

The Holy Spirit is Light and Life, a living fountain of all spiritual reality; He is the Essence of Wisdom, the Spirit of knowledge; He is Goodness and Understanding, the Leader of Righteousness; He cleanses us from sin; He is divine and makes us so; He is Fire proceeding from Fire; his word is action, the distribution of gifts. Through Him God witnesses, prophets and apostles were crowned.⁴

3. PG 75, 1088; translated and quoted by George Maloney, *Man the Divine Icon* (Pecos: Dove Publications, 1973), pp. 180-181. Cf. A.M. Bermejo, *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria* (Ona: Facultad de Teologia, 1963).

4. Byzantine Daily Worsh, tr. and ed. by most Rev. Joseph Raya and Baron Jose de Vink, Alleluia Press, 1969.

III. 3. *Jesus Christ, the High Priest who brings Fire from Heaven*

Rgveda begins with this famous poem attributed to Fire, the High Priest.

I magnify God, the divine fire, the High Priest
The minister of sacrifice, the offerer of oblation,
The Supreme Giver of treasure (*RV. I,1,1*).

Divinity is fire. It is divine fire that descends from heaven and transforms the human self. Fire is a chosen symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes down to us as divine fire, awakens us, sanctifies us and transforms us into another Christ.

The ancient people of India considered fire as the High Priest who offers sacrifice to God. Fire, with its elongated flames, takes our sacrifice to heaven. Fire also receives and consumes the sacrifice. Because of these reasons the Indian people considered fire as the Priest who is the offerer of oblation to God. Jesus Christ came to us as the High Priest who brought fire from heaven. "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled" (Lk. 12:49). Jesus also offered himself as an acceptable sacrifice to God. He is the Supreme offerer of oblation and the giver of all treasures to humanity.

The symbol of fire is well known in the eastern tradition, in India as well as in eastern Christianity. St. Ephraim sings:

Blessed are you, my brethren,
For the Fire of Mercy has come down
Utterly devouring your sins

And purifying and sanctifying your bodies.⁵ (Epiphany 3:10)

In the Canticle of Faith St. Ephraim identifies fire with the Holy Spirit: "Fire entered Mary's womb, put on a body and came forth" (Faith 4:2). For St. Ephraim fire is the symbol of the Spirit. He explains the mystery of the Eucharist saying: "The Spirit is in the bread, the Fire in the wine" (Faith 10:8).

5. For the poems of St. Ephraim ref. Sebastian Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Poems of St. Ephraim*, 1975, 2nd ed. 1983.

Jesus Christ breathes his Spirit into his disciples that, awakened by the divine Fire, they also offer themselves as acceptable sacrifice to God. It is fire that accepts and consumes the sacrifice.

Once the fire of the Spirit burns our sins away, Christ gives us back the robe of glory, which the first parents have lost. Ephraim contrasts robe of glory to the robe of skin. The supposition is that the first parents were dressed in glory before the fall and the Lord has stripped off his robe of glory that Adam and Eve regain what they had already lost. He sings:

All these changes did the Merciful One make,
 Stripping off glory and putting on a body;
 For He had devised a way to reclothe Adam
 In that glory which Adam had stripped off.
 Christ was wrapped in swaddling clothes,
 Corresponding to Adam's leaves,
 Christ put on clothes, instead of Adam's skins;
 He was baptized for Adam's sin,
 His body was embalmed for Adam's death,
 He rose and raised up Adam in his glory.
 Blessed is He who descended, put Adam on and ascended.
 (Nativity 23:13)

Jesus Christ is not only the High Priest but also one who redeems us from sin and beautifies us with divine fire. The divine fire is the abiding Spirit within us, which can remain hidden, until and unless we are well disposed and submit ourselves to the working of the abiding Spirit. As I mentioned earlier, the Atman, the abiding Spirit within us, is to be understood as the Spirit of our Lord living in and operating through us. This is the perfect Christian understanding in the light of the text of Jesus himself: "I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5).

Conclusion

1. India has developed a profound search into the reality of God abiding in us, which deserves our attention and can give us inspiration.

2. God abides in us in the form of consciousness which can be covered by many other layers of consciousness such as, the mental layer, the sense layer, the world layer etc.
3. Only through faith we really come in touch with God. Faith is seeing everything through the eye of God. This eye is the Holy Spirit abiding in us, who with his "uncreated energy" inspires us from within, awakens us to the divine, enlightens us, transforms us and divinises us. Because faith is seeing things through the eye of God, through the mind and heart of Jesus (Phil. 2:5), faith is always a gift and it demands from our part a complete surrender, and at times even of reason.
4. As we surrender to the acts of the Holy Spirit, he infuses his very divine consciousness into us, which first purifies, then transforms and divinises us to such a degree that we look like God/Christ. Thus the dictum "knowing is becoming" is acceptable also to us. So also the expression divinisation (*Theosis*) or God-realization can be seen from a Christian perspective.
5. *Theosis* is not the extinction of the human individual but the elevation of the same to the divine likeness. In true Christian interiority our consciousness is to be completely charged by Christ-consciousness, which is not to be understood as consciousness about Christ in the rational level (as in our theology), but the very consciousness of Christ now operating in you and me as subject.
6. Seen from this perspective, the Spirit which is God's own life, light and love in us, is not an object of our mind, but the ultimate subject beneath all our actions, as the vine in the branches: "without me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). Thus the Spirit is to be understood as the ultimate Self within our individual selves. This kind of a Christian understanding will bring us very close to the Indian thinking but certainly not identical with it.
7. Christ is also the High Priest, who brought Fire from heaven and offered himself as an acceptable sacrifice. The disciples of Christ are called to do the same.
8. Long years of our theological formation seems to make God too much of an object of our mind. Theology largely moves in the level

of reason, though its inception is from faith. For growing in faith, the soul has to delve deep into the mysteries of the Spirit, which is done by making an inward journey along with the Holy Spirit, till it reaches its unfathomable depth, with a lot of experience and agony of realization. This must be a journey in the light of faith and not in the realm of reason. The Indian and Eastern experience of the Spirit can give us a lot of light in making this journey.

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Christological Perspectives Emerging from the Dalit Experience and Struggles

A. Alangaram

The marginalisation of the dalits is a basic malaise of Indian society. A. Alangaram analyses the tragic experiences of exploitation, rejection and persecution felt in dalit communities. In them he finds the suffering of the crucified Saviour continued. And in their subversive actions he discovers the transforming presence of the Spirit of the Risen Christ. In as much as 'paschal mystery is re-enacted whenever and wherever the dalits suffer for the cause of justice' there is a great scope for a Christology from the grass-roots level. A. Alangaram SJ teaches theology at Arulkadal, Jesuit Regional Theology Centre, Madras - 28

1. Theology for Change and Transformation

Today in any given context, theology is not only an interpretation of human life in the light of God's Reign but also it is a leaven that transforms¹ life according to God's plan of revelation and the signs of the times. The Dalit theology is a contextual theology that interprets the experience and struggle of the Dalit communities in the light of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Such a hermeneutical effort aims at transforming the lives of Dalits who are oppressed for centuries.² In Asian continent it is estimated that there are 260 million Dalits who long for liberation and life. I have not taken the religions of the Dalits in

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1. For further details confr. V.F. Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, Vidyavanam Publications, Bangalore, 1995, pp. 169-212.
 2. "Booklet on the Holy Spirit", tr. B. Jackson; *Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, vol. VIII, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, n.d.), p. 25.

general for my reflection. Neither will I claim that I have dealt very elaborately on various problems of the Dalits. All that I try to attempt is to look for Christological perspectives that emerge from the Dalit experience and struggles. First I will describe the Dalit situations and proceed to reflect the life of Jesus. An exercise like this is a process in which I take the Dalit reality and look for the Christological convergence. This will enable us to see the paschal mystery of dying and rising in the Dalits' struggle and victory.

1.1 *The Experience of Being Rejected*

The Dalits are the rejected people in every village in India. Their rejection is based on an ideology of caste that is supported and sustained by a socio-religious understanding of purity and impurity. In Indian caste hierarchical structure, the Dalits do not have even a place. They are stamped as impure, they are called as the outcastes and they are treated as untouchables. One of the main reasons attributed to their impurity is that the entire life of the Dalits is centred around and associated with death. When someone dies in a village it is the Dalits who have to communicate this information to all the relatives of the deceased. They have to put up a *Pandal* (means a tent) in front of the house of a deceased person. They are called to remove dead animals in a village and bury them. Many of them are made so poor and kept illiterate that they can eat only dead animals that are thrown away in the wastelands. They remove the skin of the dead animals and make sandals for the so-called high caste. As they are forced to do such works that are associated only with *Death*, they are considered to be impure and polluted and therefore treated as untouchables and kept out side of the villages.

Even in modern times when some Dalits do a job that is entirely different from the oppressive traditional ones, they are still considered to be untouchables because no one can change one's caste. The practice of untouchability though banned according to Indian criminal law it is practised in some parts of India even today. Since the residential places of the Dalits are fixed outside of every village and they are known as colonies, we need not have any proof to show the practice of untouchability in India. It is a great curse³ on our nation and it is an

3. PG 75, 1088; translated and quoted by George Maloney, *Man the Divine Icon* (Pecos: Dove Publications, 1973), pp. 180-181. Cf. A.M. Bermejo, *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria* (Ona: Facultad de Teologia, 1963).

insult to the Indian constitution. The Dalits feel that they are completely rejected in their own country by their own people.

The experience of being rejected by one's own people and in one's own place is also the experience of Jesus of Nazareth and his parents. We read in the scriptures when Joseph and Mary came from Nazareth to Bethlehem to enrol their names, ... "she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7). Mary and Joseph could not find a place, may be because they were not very influential people or they were not rich enough to hire a room. Mary wrapping the child in swaddling clothes is a clue for us to understand that Joseph was not a man of means. As they were poor, all people in Bethlehem rejected them. All they could do was to go out of the tiny city and find a place in a cattle-shed, a manger for the baby Jesus. So Jesus was born outside of a city that too in a cattle-shed. "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (Jn 1:11).

As he began his ministry Jesus revealed to his people that his mission was not only to the Jews but also for all people in the world. The Jews who could not accept this revelation of Jesus took him to a mountaintop to throw him down headlong. Jesus felt rejected by his people in his hometown but he escaped from their cruel plan. His preaching, teaching and doing challenged the then existing socio-political and socio-economic structures. Jesus opposed those structures because they oppressed and dehumanised the poor. The socio-political leaders together planned how to destroy Jesus (Mk 3:6) and they rejected him totally.

1.2. The Experience of Being Neglected

Rejection of the Dalits has led to a state of neglect. The Dalits experience and feel that they are a neglected people. As they are forcibly kept outside the villages, they are forbidden to have a share in the basic facilities like drinking water, electricity and other facilities, which are available to others in a village. They are aware today as how they are systematically neglected in all walks of life. Many of them are politically zero, socially oppressed, economically poor and religio-culturally dehumanised. They are refused opportunities to grow as human persons. Their basic human rights are denied. The Dalits rights are human rights. Their life is like a bonsai tree whose branches are continuously cut that

they may not grow as a full-fledged tree. They have a stunt growth. This leads them to a spirituality of helplessness and to a psychology of pain and shame.

Jesus had experienced a situation of total neglect in his life and therefore he explained and expressed it as how he was neglected in his life: ..."Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head". One could also understand that Jesus makes a reference to the rulers of his time. Fox symbolised the Herodians and the eagle symbolised the Romans. The rulers and all those who were of support to them had a comfortable life, but Jesus representing the masses did not have a comfortable life. Jesus like the poor was neglected and experienced hunger (Mk 11:12) thirst (Jn 4:7) and he wept at the loss of human lives (Jn 11:35). After his discourse on the Eucharist (Jn 6:32-58) many left him and neglected his teaching. Having experienced a state of neglect Jesus asked the twelve, "Will you also go away?" He experienced often threat to his life and he managed to escape from them (Jn 7:1; Mk 11:18; Lk 5:21; Jn 10:31-39; Jn 11:53-54).

1.3. The Experience of Being Exploited and Persecuted

The state of neglect further made the Dalits to suffer exploitation and persecution. For centuries, the Dalits have been systematically made landless, poor and illiterate. They are forced to work in the lands of the high-castes for more than eight hours for a meagre sum of money or merely for food or even as bonded labourers. This pattern of life exposed neither the Dalit parents nor their children to the world of education and knowledge. Thus they have been kept in a world of ignorance and darkness. Thus they were and are exploited. Whenever they protested against such exploitation, they were also persecuted.

Jesus himself was many times persecuted. There was a time when he could no more stay and preach in Judea because the Jews sought to kill him (Jn 7:1). During his public ministry there had been times when he and his disciples have to hide themselves in the wilderness near a town called Ephraim (Jn 11:54), so that they might not get arrested by the powers of the time. There was a time when open orders were issued for the arrest of Jesus (Jn 11:57). During the time of his arrest he was slapped on his face, scourged at a pillar, crowned with thorns, condemned to death, that too a death on a cross in the company of criminals. It was the

cup of suffering Jesus earlier spoke of and it was the baptism he was longing for - to suffer, die and rise again (Mk 10:39). Being rejected, neglected, exploited and persecuted is the Dalits' image of Jesus Christ relevant for India today. This is the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ and it is being revealed even today in the lives of the Dalits. This revelation gives the Dalits, the unwavering hope that all of them will someday rise again to glory, the glory similar to that of Jesus Christ making them all sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father.

2. The Crucified People

The Dalits suffer untold suffering, pain and shame in their daily life. In many villages of India, the Dalits who are Indians like other Indians are kept outside the villages. The questions raised spontaneously in our minds are: How is it that one fifth of our Indian population is kept outside of our villages? Who are all responsible? Is it the caste-culture, or the religions or the so-called Indian high caste people themselves or all of them together? Yes, we must accept our sinfulness without hiding it that all of them together are responsible for making the Dalits what they are today.

The Dalits are a people like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36). The Dalits are *the crucified people* of our nation. They are made economically poor, politically powerless and socio-culturally oppressed. They are kept not only outside of our villages but also outside of temples and churches as untouchables. They are crucified in their colonies where there is no regular supply of ration (neither rice nor wheat), no drinking water, no government projects for development, no schools or other educational institutions for the children, no medical facilities for the families, no transportation, no supply of electricity and no access to modern communication and mass media. Like any human person they too need all these. But they are crucified and they are kept hungry and thirsty (Jn 19:28). They weep, cry and struggle for life, freedom and liberation.

2.1. *Christian Dalits doubly Oppressed*

Historically the Dalits in India have embraced different religions in different times for various reasons. In order to liberate themselves from the cultural and religious oppression of Hinduism, Dalits have embraced Christianity and other religions. But alas to their dismay even after

embracing Christianity they experience also in the Churches similar caste and religious oppression and discrimination. In every oppressed Dalit society the Christian Dalits are doubly oppressed and forsaken. There is no support either from the Churches or from the State and Central Governments. While the Hindu Dalits in India at least receive help from the Government to construct their houses and scholarships for the education of their children, the Christian Dalits are not given such help. Thus the Christian Dalits are the poorest of the poor and completely forsaken in Tamilnadu and elsewhere in India. They keep crying with the hope that God will some day hear their cry and quench their thirst and wipe their tears. Till then they have to walk *the Way of the Cross* with an unwavering hope of resurrection.

2.2. *Soteriological Potential in Suffering*

As Christians, the Dalit Christians remember how the people in Jerusalem accused Jesus (Jn 18:35), and how they kept him outside the city of Jerusalem (Mk 15:20; Heb 13:12). They also cherish in their memory the suffering, the ill treatment, death and resurrection of Jesus. He himself, like the Dalits, suffered rejection, neglect and persecution and told the disciples that "... the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed and after three days rise again" (Mk 8:31). He was forced to carry the Cross, was crucified and died. His people crucified him that he could not come into the city of Jerusalem again. After the crucifixion, the place where they buried him was also outside of the city (Jn 19:20). But the God of history and the God of life raised Jesus to life from the very place that was outside the Jerusalem city.

Thus the very places - '*the colonies*', existing outside the Indian villages where the Dalits are forced to live in an inhuman condition, where they are humiliated, ill treated, kept aside as unclean and untouchable people, will be the places of God's redemption and revolution. Their cry is like the cry of the Crucified God, Jesus Christ who "cried out in a loud voice, '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*'" - which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mk 15:34). In their experience of rejection, neglect, exploitation and persecution, the Dalits find a soteriological potential. It is an insight for the Dalits from the life of Jesus. It is a process of God's revelation and salvation. This is

how God has shown us the way of salvation/liberation through the prophets and finally through his Son Jesus Christ who became one among (us) the Dalits and the marginalized. Jesus said, blessed are the people who hunger and thirst for justice (Mt 5:6). The people who long for justice are the Dalits who live under rejection and oppression. But the suffering is worth the trouble because it is the way to inherit God's Kingdom (Mt 5:10).

It is the hope of the Dalits that the very places where they are all crucified (outside of the Indian villages) will be the places of their liberation/resurrection. It will be the work of God. It will be a wonder to all because the very stone the builders rejected will be made the corner stone (Ps 118:22; Acts 4:11). The experience of St. Paul is a reminder to all of us that the Christ Crucified is (the Dalits are) the power and wisdom of God (1Cor 1:23-24). In the powerlessness and brokenness of Jesus what is hidden is the *power* and *wisdom* of God. So too from the powerlessness and brokenness of the Dalits will break forth liberation/salvation through the power of the Spirit of the living God. The Spirit of the Lord is upon the Dalits to release them from their captivities and to set them at liberty (Lk 4:18).

3. God's Reign in the Dalits' Action

The good news of Jesus is that those who wish to enter God's Reign have to choose a narrow path. How do the Dalits understand the narrow path, in the following of Jesus in their context of oppression? It means looking at the existing oppressive situation; the Dalits have to become angry and restless. The anger of the Dalits is constructive and their restlessness is creative. Secondly they have to opt for subversive actions. The subversive actions mean to choose life and not death, to do good and not evil (Mk 3:4), to live and to be attuned to the inner life rather than what is exterior (Mk 7:1-23) and to worship God in Spirit and truth (Jn 4:23-24). Thirdly they have to hope and work for a new society. It is a vision and promise of Jesus Christ of a new society in which God is our *Abba* and *Amma* and we are all God's children.

3.1. *Anger and restlessness of the Dalits*

The theologian Gustavo Gutierrez writes in his book *Theology of Liberation* that sin is not only individual and private but also historical,

social and structural.⁴ Such a reflection enables us to understand as to how the Dalits in India have been made victims of these sins. It was in the past history and in this part of the world, the Brahmins and innumerable kings decided to treat the Dalits as untouchables and kept them poor and slaves outside of villages. Thus the Dalits are the victims of historical sin. Indian society is a caste society. Almost all social relationships are caste based. A clear proof for this even today is the marriage ads in papers, stating clearly ones own caste and looking for a Bride or Groom of the same caste. Dalits cannot marry persons of other castes even when they are equally smart and well qualified. Thus the Dalits suffer from inhuman social sin. Moreover whether it is in a village, at micro level or all over India, at macro level the Dalits are oppressed by all social, political and economic structures. In other words the existing political system has made the Dalits powerless, economic structures have made them poor and the social and religious structures have made them weak and oppressed. Thus the Dalits are the victims of structural sins. The Dalits are angry when they understand the sinful situation that has ruined their lives.

Privatisation and liberalisation of the market are the results of globalisation. In a country like India, there were reservations of places and jobs for the Dalits and the Tribals. Now through the process of privatisation of industries, banks, communication and other sectors, the most affected people are the Dalits and the Tribals. In future they will not have places reserved for them either in educational institutions or in any Government run companies or departments. They have to compete with other powerful groups who have costly formation and costly education all along their lives. How far is it justifiable to expect the Dalits and the Tribals to compete on par with the people who have been trained in nationally and internationally reputed schools and universities? Given the present state of economic life of the Dalits, they cannot afford to pay such exorbitant fees for their studies. The Dalits being poor are not be able to buy the consumer products, which are in wide range made available to the rich and to the

4. Byzantine Daily Worsh , tr. and ed. by most Rev. Joseph Raya and Baron Jose de Vink, Alleluia Press, 1969.

people of high middle income. Neither have they enough money to buy producer goods that can sustain their daily life.

The anger of the Dalits makes them restless. They are restless till they change these unjust structures made through unjust history in an unjust society. Further they also propose ways that are creative to transform society. They are critical of the existing caste discrimination that brings inhuman oppression and hence they want to eradicate casteism and bring about a casteless society. It is a prophetic character of the Dalits. The Dalits long for an apocalyptic community where the vision and dream of Jesus Christ will be fully realised.

Jesus " when he saw the crowds had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9: 36). He planned to bring all those who were pushed to the periphery to the centre. He ate and drank with them and celebrated life with them. It is to them Jesus promised first the Reign of God. In this process of transformation Jesus was fully aware of the persons who were against him and the poor. He was angry and grieved at the hardness of heart of the Pharisees (Mk 3:5), and he in his anger said to the Pharisees and scribes that they were blind guides and hypocrites (Mt 23:13-29) because neither they enter themselves into Reign of God, nor allow those who would enter to go in (Mt 23:14). He was restless when he saw that his Father's house was made a house of trade and with a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables (Jn 2:14-16).

3.2. *Subversive Actions*

Subversion means literally to destroy the power and influence of an established system. From the perspective of the Dalits, subversion means to destroy every element of the social, political, cultural, economic and religious systems that dehumanise them today. In their world view the word subversion is seen positively. It is a work of God. Day after day God Almighty is busy with such works. Subversion is the basis of the Reign of God. God of history is busy with changing and transforming every oppressive society. This is what we learn from the *Magnificat* of Mary: God with his mighty power scattered the proud hearted, he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those who are weak

and poor. He has taken away the wealth from the rich and sent them away empty handed and filled the poor and the hungry with good things (Lk 1:51-53). The hymn of Mary is just a summary of all that has happened in the history of Israel and also foretells of what God will continue to do in our history today.

An act of subversion against the oppressive forces and structures is on the one hand a way of protest and on the other hand a way of celebration of the weak. One of the acts of subversion of the Dalits is to eat beef. Eating beef is an act of subversion. Moreover a cow or a bull slaughter is also a community celebration and an act of sharing among people. In India the phenomenon of caste has entered even into beef-eating. The people who eat beef are branded as impure and of low caste. The so-called high caste people do not eat beef guided by their caste culture and practices. They also inculcate in the minds of other people that beef eating is somewhat below human dignity and it is something to be abhorred by humans.

The argument of the high caste does not hold water. Their understanding cannot be proved true scientifically today. Neither can it be accepted as universally true. In Europe people prefer beef to all other meats. It is also costly as compared to other meat items. When I was in Innsbruck doing my doctoral studies I received an Indian family as my guest. They live and work in England. The day of their arrival we had beef at home for lunch. Not knowing fully well their background I asked them whether or not they eat beef. Later they told me that they are Brahmins, but because of the climate and food habit in England they are now accustomed to beef eating. I appreciated them for their honesty and sincerity in sharing with me openly their personal life-style. The behaviour of this family threw some light on my reflection. It enabled me to perceive the matter further and to see how human beings form their food habits according to the social, economic and environmental situation.

Hence it is clear that we cannot and should not brand human beings as low or high on account of their food habits. But it is an unfortunate and inhuman situation in India that the Dalits are ill-treated and oppressed because they are beef-eaters. As one of the signs of protest the Dalits insist on meat eating and proclaim that meat eating is good. Also cost-wise it is cheaper compared to other meat items. The scenario is at present

changing. The people of other castes are happy to eat beef as regularly as possible now. As a result the cost of beef is shooting up now in Tamil Nadu and other states in India.

Jesus was criticised for the manner in which he and his disciples ate (Mt 11:19). The Pharisees argued that when one eats food without washing ones hands it defiles that person. Therefore they insisted on external purity. But at the same time they never bothered about internal purity of heart (Mt 23:27-28) which is according to Jesus directly responsible for "evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness and slander. He was also found fault with his custom of eating with sinners and tax collectors (Mk 2:16). The Pharisees accused him of gluttony (Lk 7:34). Moreover a Jew is not expected to drink or eat with Samaritans. But Jesus asks for water to drink from a Samaritan woman and stays in a Samaritan village for two days (Jn 4:40). This solidarity with the outcaste is a subversive action of Jesus. The 'Abba' experience of Jesus is the foundation for this action. That is why we can say that all the programs of Jesus are acts of subversion to transform the world.

3.3. *Conclusion: the Future of Dalits*

The anger of Dalits and all their subversive actions alone are not enough for the coming of the Reign of God on earth. The Dalits wait patiently like Jesus the Crucified for the resurrection/reconstruction of people and society. In Jesus, the Cross symbolizes best the Dalitness. "On the cross, he was the broken, crushed, split, torn, driven asunder son of God, the Dalit in the fullest possible meaning of that term, 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' The Son of God feels that He is God forsaken. That feeling of being God-forsaken is at the heart of our Dalit experience in India. It is the Dalitness of the divinity that we see in the Cross of Jesus."⁵ Whenever and wherever the Dalits suffer for the cause of justice, the paschal mystery is re-enacted. It is, "there Christ is united to his loyal members; it is there the real Church is gathered."⁶ Today in and through such innumerable sufferings and

5. For the poems of St. Ephraim ref. Sebastian Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Poems of St. Ephraim*, 1975, 2nd ed. 1983.

6. Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (USA: Orbis, Mary Knoll, 1988) P. 5.

generous sacrifices, the Dalit movements "have reasserted the dignity of millions of people who had been crushed to dust...."⁷ Until the Dalits achieve total liberation, the struggle will go on and the Christ Crucified will continue to remain the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24). One may ask what Jesus had achieved in his life-time. Was he a failure or success? All that Jesus did on the Cross was that he made the living God present to the world. The living God who is the God of history and the God of salvation/liberation.

Today the Dalits are voiceless and powerless but they will not remain like that for long. Because, "... it is the power of God to set the oppressed free (Lk 4, 18) so that they would realize the potentials of the New life in Christ."⁸ While they protest against all the oppressions and unjust structures, they need a *metanoia* among themselves, without which a total liberation will be not possible. Overcoming division by unity, betrayal by trust, hatred by forgiveness are some of the essential and positive attitudes the Dalits may cultivate among themselves. This in turn will, "go on transforming the relationships of hatred, egoism, discrimination and exploitation into relationship of love, solidarity, justice and peace among (them)."⁹

We have to think not only in terms of total liberation of the Dalits, but also the reconstruction of Dalit communities. It will include all their social and religious aspirations like education, proper care of children, remedial schools for the dropouts, education and conscientization of children, youth, men and women, provision of different employment opportunities like carpentry, painting, brick making etc. Organizing cultural programmes for recreation and creation of counter culture, planning social gatherings to dine together with other castes, which will bring equality among our people and also encouraging intercaste marriages. Such a praxis of

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7. "An Indian Search for a Spirituality of Liberation", *Voices From the Third World*, June, 1990, P. 68.
 8. Felix N. Sugirtharaj, "A Testimony of Suffering from India" *National Council of Churches Review*, CX (May 1990), P. 289.
 9. Segundo Galilea, *The Reign of God and Human Liberation* (Quezon: Claretial Publication, 1987), P. 19.

reconstruction with "our commitment to the Dalits, a crucified people of our own times..."¹⁰ will lead our people toward an 'oikumene' of the people of God. For it is our hope that in and through our fellowship, commitment, struggle and suffering, victory over social, historical and structural sins is possible.¹¹ This is how we understand the paschal mystery of dying and rising in the Dalits' struggle and victory.

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10. Willian Madtha, "Datit Theology: Voice of the oppressed", *Dharma*, XVI (Jan-March 1991), 82.
 11. Galilea, P. 22.

Book Review

Garry Wills, *WHY I AM A CATHOLIC*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002.

Garry Wills is best known as the author of *Papal Sin* which as an expose of the fundamental dishonesty of the church hierarchy was the object of much praise and also of much criticism. In the present book he explains why he remains a Catholic in spite of the failure of human authorities in the Church. The book opens with an autobiographical section some forty pages long and closes with a section on the Apostle's Creed and the Our Father of equal length. In between are some 236 pages on the papacy and the history of the European Church, which is perhaps the main scope of the book. With some painstaking research he brings out that most of the secondary assumptions on which ordinary Catholics base their faith in the Church are illfounded and unnecessary for faith.

Wills begins by reflecting on his childhood experiences and later his experiences as a Jesuit seminarian and explains the importance of Catholicism in his life. For most scholars the criticism of the hierarchical Church is sufficiently well known. But Wills is writing for the majority of ordinary Catholics who think that every word from the throne of Peter and the many thrones in that vicinity is divine revelation, more important than the Word of God. With a good deal of understatement rather than exaggeration the author shows how the claims of Roman supremacy and infallibility and other claims are later fabrications made necessary in order to compete with the political forces that tried to use the church for their own political advantage. What he wants to tell the people is that Christian faith should not depend on such concocted externals of political power but on the mysteries of faith. These include the fatherhood of God, the Trinitarian fellowship to which all are invited,

the creation, the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Resurrection and even the ordinary daily faith expressions of faith such as devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the Rosary, the nurturing Catholic family and the like. Even the Church itself and the leadership of the Pope are helpful and valuable for the ordinary faithful.

The liberals who reviewed both *Papal Sin* and *Why I am A Catholic* have heaped criticism on the two books and characterized them as “angry tirades”. They are more persuaded by the critique of religion by Nietzsche and the postmodernists, or biblical criticism and the like. What Wills emphasizes the simple faith of the people than the sophisticated knowledge of intellectuals. “The personal nature of creation as God’s act explains our instinct to be grateful to thinks simply for existing, to feel an obligation to the sunrise”. (p. 311) “Actually the four Gospels, though they rely on earlier oral and written material, were given their present form after the fall of the Jewish temple in 70CE. The crises of that period are reflected in these accounts... One of the most interesting things about these early glimpses of a tradition from Christ’s time is that they have as “high” a Christology as anything in Paul” (p. 317). “Christianity arose from a recognition of Christ’s divinity. Only then was his human career studies in the light of that faith ... I find the story of Christianity more convincing precisely because it begins with a great blinding light, from which men stumble only gradually, their eyes still dazzled, towards more coherent attempts to understand what has happened” (p. 318-19).

What Wills tries to do in the book is to lead people to the basics of their own faith, in spite of the disillusionment created by modern scholarship regarding the secondary props to faith artificially produced in the Middle Ages.

John B. Chethimattam